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ABSTRACT

An assessment model is presented that breaks reading down into six discrete skill areas that are both teachable and assessable. The six traits of an effective reader are: (1) decoding conventions; (2) establishing comprehension; (3) realizing content; (4) developing interpretation; (5) integrating for synthesis; and (6) critiquing for evaluation. Chapter 1 explains and develops these traits. Chapters 2 through 5 are devoted to specific grade levels, outlining reading development and effective teaching for kindergarten through grade 2, grades 3 through 5, the intermediate and middle school years, and high school and later years. Each of the grade-specific chapters contains a four-part framework to outline reading assessment and instruction. Each contains a theoretical review of research activities, samples of student work, six lesson plans for the grade levels, and a list of recommended books appropriate for student readers at that grade level. Seven appendixes contain a reader interest survey, a reading development continuum, discussions of the traits of an effective reader at the various grade levels, and three sample texts. (Contains 6 figures and 38 references.) (SLD)

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THE JOURNEY OF A READER

K-12 ASSESSMENT TASKS AND TOOLS

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The Journey of a Reader: K-12 Assessment Tasks and Tools

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January 1999

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I would like to gratefully acknowledge the kindness of teachers in Alaska, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, and Washington who unselfishly opened the doors of their classrooms to our research. Thanks go also to the students who opened their minds and hearts to the essays and stories we read together. Your reflections, your thoughts, your values, and your reading responses made our samples "come alive." Finally, to the schools, districts, and states who recognize the power and authenticity of "critical reading"—you are the pioneers. You have set the course for our journey of a reader.

Many thanks,

Lesley D. Thompson

Lesley D. Thompson

The Journey of a Reader:
K-12 Assessment Tasks and Tools

Table of Contents

Page

Foreword i
Introduction iii

Chapter One
The Role of Theory and Practice in Assessing and Instructing Reading 1

Chapter Two
The K-3 Classroom: Giving Them Roots and Wings 47

Chapter Three
The Grade 3-5 Classroom: Moving Beyond Narrative Texts 85

Chapter Four
The Middle-School Years: Reading Across the Content Areas 115

Chapter Five
High School and Beyond: Reading for School-to-Work and Higher Education 145

Glossary of Reading Assessment Terms 189

Bibliography 195

Appendices

Foreword

The Journey of Readers in Kennewick, Washington:

"We work hard to teach our students in the early years to read printed words and symbols on a page but how do we teach them the skills needed to be lifelong critical readers?" This became a frequent concern of teachers in our district. Staff knew that students needed instruction in critical reading, but we lacked specific instructional strategies, a common "reading" language, commitment from teachers in all content areas, and the assessment tools to really do an effective job. The Traits of an Effective Reader were developed at just the right time for teachers and students in the Kennewick School District!

Is reading to learn different than learning to read? Yes! Primary teachers in our district are working very hard to reach our third grade reading goal: 90 percent of all third- graders reading on grade level. The curriculum, assessment, and instruction are all in place in the primary grades to help make this goal a future reality.

However, what does it take to teach students to become critical readers? How do we help them become better readers in an organized, sequential process? Is reading in the content areas a different skill than reading literature? These questions have been ongoing in our district, and in a multitude of districts across Washington State, as students are required to meet high state standards in reading. No longer are tests just asking students to read a passage and select a multiple-choice response! Students are being asked to answer questions in which they must *apply* their reading skills. The NWREL workshops with Dr. Lesley Thompson have helped our district make a giant step towards understanding *how* to teach students critical reading skills.

How can I possibly teach one more thing? This is a common, and very truthful, lament of district teachers in today's classrooms. As we stumble through state standards and new state test results, and the benchmarks and components required to get students to get students to these goals, we are all experiencing real pressures to get students to be successful with the tougher standards. Our teachers are discovering that instruction in the reading traits is not "more"—but it provides an excellent model and a common language to teach reading more effectively.

But I teach social studies, and now you want me to teach reading? How often have we heard this comment in our middle and high schools? The very clear message is that we are all teachers of reading. Social studies teachers, math teachers, science teachers, and vocational teachers voiced a giant "aha!" when they discovered that the lessons and rubrics provided with the Traits of an Effective Reader would make a difference in their content area classrooms. The research, student examples, lessons, and assessment tools can be applied equally to literature as well as to content area reading.

Will the Reading Traits make a difference in Kennewick? Yes! We think the Traits of an Effective Reader will become as powerful of an institution in our district as the NWREL Six Traits of Writing! It's been exciting to attend the district and building meetings and listen to how the lessons are being applied in a variety of content area classrooms—we are truly on our way!

Thank you, Lesley, for organizing the teaching of reading into an understandable, teacher-friendly format! The "journey of a reader" has begun in our district!

Bev Henderson
Assessment and Staff Development Coordinator
Kennewick School District
Kennewick, Washington

Introduction

Reading is about more than just reading the symbols and letters on the page. When good readers read, they read critically, they read deeply, they apply information and pull on their experience to understand the world of ideas and subjects. As educators, we want all readers to know and be able to develop the skills of critical reading.

At the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, we have spent two years studying how readers develop critical reading skills, how teachers convey those skills, and, finally, how those skills are assessed in both a classroom environment and a large-scale forum. Our compilation of data has led us to the publication of this book. Again and again as we studied classrooms around the country, educators commented, "The teaching of reading is so vast. Just when I think I have covered comprehension thoroughly, I realize that my students may comprehend the material, but they now need to learn how to apply their reading; they need to learn how to deepen their reading. It just seems there is always more to do."

In order to serve the needs of educators to assess—and thus instruct—critical reading performance in student readers, we have developed an assessment model that breaks reading down into a manageable group of teachable—and thus assessable—skills. This is where the assessment model the Traits of an Effective Reader, comes in. By separating reading performance into six discrete skill areas—or "traits"—we have identified what good readers do, and we are able to describe "good reading" to readers who read on a variety of ability levels. The six traits of an effective reader are **Decoding Conventions, Establishing Comprehension, Realizing Context, Developing Interpretation, Integrating for Synthesis,** and **Critiquing for Evaluation.**

Comments by Effective Readers Who Are Using the Traits

Decoding Conventions: *"I think this is a book written about the author by the author; it's called autobiography, I think. I know it, because he uses the word 'I.' "*

Establishing Comprehension: *"The first turning moment was when the fire started and the second would be when they had to get out of the burning building; the final turning moment is when they found the cats."*

Realizing Context: *"The hot tin sheds and the white false fronts of the store really stick out for me—they are just so Southern-sounding."*

Developing Interpretation: *"I think these people are breaking the law on purpose; I learned in my biography on Martin Luther King that some of his followers would purposely break the law to stand up for what they believed in."*

Integrating for Synthesis: *" 'Nativity' was real to me; Baby Wolf was just a story."*

Critiquing for Evaluation: *"You have to go beyond what's on a piece of paper. You have to look at the author and see if he is biased."*

The Philosophy

As you use this book to increase your knowledge of reading assessment and instruction, you may notice that many activities are ones that you already use in your classroom. This is exactly what we would expect! But do notice that there is a difference between traditional reading activities and the Traits of an Effective Reader reading activities. The difference is the use of a common language—the criteria associated with reading skills—between teachers and students. By using the trait terms and their accompanying list of skills, students understand the indicators of good reading. They can use a scoring guide to evaluate their own performance and set goals to improve their reading. In essence, they have moved from a passive reading experience to an active one.

We have included in this book the K-3 developmental continuum and the two grade 4-12 scoring guides for literary and informational texts we recommend for teachers to use to assess student reading performance. Further, we have included many activities, assessment models, and even 24 actual lesson plans that illustrate the Traits of an Effective Reader in the classroom.

As you build a thorough reading assessment plan in your own classroom, think of creating readers who can demonstrate both a *breadth* and a *depth* of reading skills. We've developed a two-sided system based on this idea of breadth and depth. Here are the indicators of a sound reading assessment system in your classroom:

- **Tasks and tools:** examine the elements that make up your reading activities and assignments right now. Decide which ones are *tasks*—activities that teach, model, and anecdotally assess student reading using criteria. Then, decide which ones are *tools*—assignments that have clearly defined criteria that assess student reading ability using a scoring guide or developmental continuum. The distinction is important: Tasks assess informally, and tools assess formally.

- **Ongoing and cumulative:** distinguish between *ongoing* and *cumulative* tasks and tools that you use in your classroom. *Ongoing* tasks and tools happen on a day-to-day basis. They encourage students to think and grow as readers as they experiment with their reading. They are not designed to assess exhaustively. *Cumulative* tasks and tools are used to encourage students to demonstrate their level of proficiency with respect to state benchmark levels. They are meant to assess exhaustively. When used together, ongoing and cumulative tasks and tools allow students to set goals for themselves and reflect on their progress.

- **Quantitative and qualitative:** create tasks and tools that examine reading skills in depth and across breadth. *Quantitative* assessment models assess all skills of a particular reading trait. In this type of model, students will demonstrate the range of skills they possess. *Qualitative* assessment models assess one skill of a particular trait. In this type of model, students will demonstrate the depth to which they understand and can apply a particular reading skill.

- **Voice and choice...**Give your students the opportunity to *voice* their reactions to, feelings about, interpretations of, and perspectives on the texts they read. Let them know that *thinking* about a text is a valued skill. Offer your student readers a *choice* of assessment tasks and tools to express their understanding of a text. By being able to choose oral, written, and even hands-on methods, different types of student readers can express their understanding in ways that match their learning styles.

Throughout this book, there will be suggestions for using the "Traits of an Effective Reader" assessment model in your own classroom. Think of these ideas as a "toolkit" of assessment options to capture the performance of reading. As teachers, we want to encourage our students to be active readers; our job is to set clear targets for success by using the literary text and informational text scoring guides as developmental continuums. One huge benefit to using ongoing and cumulative, qualitative and quantitative, and voice and choice assessment tasks and tools is the help they provide to enable students and teachers to work together to chart progress towards meeting—and even exceeding—state reading standards.

Finally, I think we all agree that what we are trying to do is to create readers who feel empowered by the process of accessing information. If we can help create readers who recognize the power of reading, what we have really created are students who will be lifelong learners.

Our Audience

This book is written for experienced and future teachers of reading, and guess what? All of us—regardless of grade level or content area—are teachers of reading. Students need our expertise for the development of reading skills at all grade levels and in all subject areas. So, in order to support the teaching and assessing of *critical* reading skills, we have focused on the "reading to learn" component of reading theory and pedagogy. You may be a K-2 teacher looking for ways to encourage independence in your emerging readers. Or you may be a 3-5 grade teacher looking for tools to enable your readers to switch between narrative and expository texts with ease and insight. Perhaps you are a 6-12 content-specific teacher looking for ways to develop instructional intervention strategies across the content areas. Whatever your situation, each of you will find your needs and your own professional expertise addressed in this book. This publication is designed to build on what you already do well in your reading instruction and assessment; it is designed to clarify—using language and clear targets—what successful reading looks like for students of all ages and abilities; and it is meant to provide you with some immediate tools to take into the classroom to enhance your students' reading experience.

Piece by Piece

This first edition of *The Journey of a Reader* contains a preface, five main chapters, an afterword, a bibliography and a glossary of common reading assessment terms. We have attempted to address all sides of reading pedagogy. To help direct you to the "pieces" you might find most helpful in your work as a teacher or an administrator, we have given each of the main chapters a specific thematic focus:

Chapter One: "*The Traits of an Effective Reader: Theory and Practice*" contains introductory material, including research from both inside and outside the classroom.

Chapter Two: "*The K-2 Classroom: Giving Them Roots and Wings*" stresses the need for a balance of skill-based and meaning-based instruction and assessment.

Chapter Three: "*The Grade 3-5 Classroom: Moving Beyond Narrative Texts*" addresses the transition students make as they begin to read for information in all subject areas.

Chapter Four: "*The Middle-School Years: Reading Across the Content Areas*" explores the types of intervention and assessment strategies necessary for students to learn to apply their reading across the curriculum.

Chapter Five: "*High School and Beyond: Reading for School-to-Work and Higher Education*" illustrates the relationship between critical thinking and critical reading that encourages students to read as a lifelong learning activity.

Within the four, grade-specific chapters, readers will find a four-part framework that we believe presents a multilayered and rich approach to the assessment and instruction of reading. Each of the four chapters begins with a theoretical review of research issues appropriate to that particular grade level. Second are student samples—in the form of written examples and transcripts of oral interviews—that illustrate a variety of student reading performance levels for that grade. Third is a selection of six lesson plans that demonstrate the assessment and instruction of one or more reading traits. Fourth and last is a list of recommended books, both literary and informational, that are appropriate for student readers at that grade level. This "piece-by-piece" design is meant to present a collection of assessment ideas that are supported by current research methods and findings.

So, let's get started...

Chapter One

The Role of Theory and Practice in Assessing and Instructing Reading

Through literature, students learn to explore possibilities and consider options for themselves and humankind. They come to find themselves, imagine others, value difference, and search for justice. They gain connectedness and seek vision. They become the literate thinkers we need to shape the decisions of tomorrow . . . . Literacy involves manipulation of the language and thought we engage in when we make sense and convey ideas in a variety of situations; it involves ways of thinking, which we learn in the many contexts of our lives. Such literacy fosters the personal empowerment that results when people use their literacy skills to think and rethink their understandings of texts, themselves, and their world. It gives importance to individuals and the oral and written texts they create and encounter; it calls upon and fosters the kinds of language and thought that mark good and sharp thinking. This is the kind of literacy that can underlie every aspect of literature education across the grades, empowering all students to reflect upon and potentially reshape themselves and their world.[1]

Judith Langer's words create for us a vision of the reader empowered by the written word, a reader searching for knowledge, a reader making connections. As teachers and researchers we have this vision in mind, but our practices—the actual teaching moments in the day, the assessments we use to assess for textual knowledge and comprehension, and the implicit values we place on actual reading experiences in the classroom—fall short of our vision. As Nancie Atwell says, "We talk a lot, much of it about the importance of literacy, of reading well and widely, of language as a prism for knowing ourselves and our world. But we seldom make class time for students to read or accommodate their choices or knowledge, and seldom do our students see their teachers reading, captivated by another's written words."[2]

In a desire to encourage and observe students in their reading, speaking, and writing with critical insight, we took the Traits of an Effective Reader assessment model to the classroom. During the winter of 1997, NWREL staff members were privileged to work

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in a third-grade classroom in Stevenson, Washington. During the pilot testing of the Traits of an Effective Reader model, the pilot site leaders attempted to put aside preconceived notions about reading instruction and assessment and, instead, worked to "take the top off" grade-level and age-level expectations for our student readers.

Action Research in the Classroom: Stevenson, Washington

The Stevenson/Carson School District comprises two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school in the remote Columbia Gorge region of south central Washington state, where poverty and unemployment rates run high. Jim Saltness, Principal of Stevenson Elementary School, comments, "Ever since the logging jobs have shut down, our student body runs at about a 40 percent poverty rate."[3] This means that four in ten students at Stevenson Elementary are on free or assisted lunch programs, that their educational experiences are subject to frequent interruptions as their parents seek work, and, as sometimes happens in an economically depressed home environment due to stress and other concerns, that their reading development may receive reduced attention from families.[4]

In spite of these difficult factors facing the Stevenson/Carson School District, both teachers and administrators were poised and ready to examine their present reading assessments, eager to learn about and experiment with alternative methods of assessing reading, and determined to enable their students to feel engaged with and passionate about texts.

Three people were involved in implementing the pilot site: Jim Saltness, Principal of Stevenson Elementary School; Patty Price, a lead teacher in a Stevenson first-second-third grade, multi-age classroom; and I (Lesley Thompson), a reading assessment researcher at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. We set up a tag-team of sorts. I proposed a three-month commitment, during which time I would visit with the children weekly and assess their achievement in specific reading traits. Patty agreed to read all of the research, test strategies in the classroom, and evaluate sample scoring guides. Jim monitored the pilot on a building level, performed observations of the strategies in process, and kept abreast of their connections to Washington State's Essential Academic Learning Requirements. Although we knew that the students provided the "grist for the mill" in terms of the research, none of us had any idea how empowered, impassioned, and engaged the children would become with the literature and the traits of reading.

Each week when I arrived (they called me the "suitcase lady" because of my huge case of books), the children—nine third-graders selected from two multi-age classrooms—would cluster around me, selecting books, pulling out their Reader's Notebooks, and jostling for space at our conference table. Our discussions would commence, focusing on the past week's books, traits and "book talks." Patty Price, Jim Saltness, and I were astounded to hear the kids pick up the reading trait language. They began talking about cultural, literary, and social issues found in the books with sophistication, sensitive insight, and complex reasoning. By the fifth week, the students were reading and discussing Gary Paulsen's *Puppies, Dogs, and Blue Northers*—a book three-to-four grade levels above their present reading ability.

How did this all happen? Partly, we believe that the "language" of the traits of reading and their corresponding indicator terms gave the students a powerful voice to articulate a process that happens mostly in a mental space. (See Glossary for a complete list of reading assessment terms.) But we also realize that these few months were a special time when all involved came together with enthusiasm and energy and said, "Let's learn the most we can about how children read." The students took the risk, and showed us how very much they love to read when their ideas, their opinions, and their values are affirmed and celebrated.

Our first decision about implementing alternative assessment methods involved the creation of individual Reader's Notebooks. I wanted student ideas, comments, thoughts, and reflections to direct the evolving assessments. Each of the nine students involved received his or her own Reader's Notebook with the student's name printed on top. This notebook served as a receptacle for notes jotted down during reading, for questions I would pose concerning the books, for questions the children themselves posed during reflecting time, and for formal written responses composed close to the end of our weekly sessions. At every meeting, we followed the same pattern: First, we gathered around a large conference table at the back of one of the two feeder classrooms. We used a blackboard occasionally while discussing vocabulary words or brainstorming possible interpretations, but for the most part, I led discussions from the table, sitting with the children as a member of the group. Second, we reviewed last week's reading and particular reading trait. Third, we previewed the present week's strategy by introducing the term and brainstorming possible connotations. Fourth, we discussed the book we were going to read together during that day's meeting. Fifth, we practiced a variety of types of reading: The children read silently to themselves; they read to one another; they read the same passage aloud to assess for fluidity and syntax; and they listened to me read aloud.

At each meeting, I also tried a variety of assessment methods. I attempted to be very forthright in introducing each new method to the children, because I wanted the "target for success" to be clear to them. Patty Price, the children's teacher, arranged to have another adult in the room during our meetings so that the other children in the classroom—the first- and second-graders of the multi-age classroom—would be engaged and involved in their own activities. Patty took this opportunity to record observations in her own Reader's Notebook. Not only did she observe the students' reactions and responses, but she, too, addressed the weekly readings as a reader new to these alternative methods of assessment and reading traits. Together—with me as a researcher, Patty Price as the teacher, and the students as our readers—we embarked upon a journey of reading.

For the remainder of Chapter One, we will link the theoretical research behind the traits of reading to the world of the classroom where we see the traits come alive in the comments, written feedback, and thinking of the Stevenson students. Theory and practice come together, then, in the description of the assessment models suggested for each of the Traits of an Effective Reader. By both instructing and assessing student performance, a clear picture of the student reader is realized—strengths and weaknesses, interests and goals, attitudes and values. A complete glossary of the *italicized assessment terms* is included at the end of the book. Finally, to aid in the "readability" of the research sections, I have provided endnote numbers to indicate where source material is included. Full citations of the resources are found in the endnotes.

Theoretical Research: Traits of an Effective Reader

In a recent literature review of articles concerning the status of reading theory and assessment, the majority of the research indicates that the actual state of *literacy* in the United States school system is at an all-time high. In fact, reading researcher Regie Routman says that "generally speaking, if we look only at the 'basics'—decoding the words on a literal level—reading achievement in the United States is actually quite good."[5] In support of this result, research by the National Assessment of Educational Progress shows that in a study of reading achievement in 32 countries, the United States outscored all countries except Finland; furthermore, today's students outperform students from earlier generations in standardized achievement tests, while reading scores among teenagers have continued to rise.[6]

However, if we look at reading as an intellectual act that encompasses more than just the literal decoding of print on a page, the research does not support a picture of American students reading with critical intent and interest. Whereas students are scoring in the competent category in literal understandings of texts, no state scored at the level of proficient or better on the National Assessment of Educational Progress test for critical reading skills. The test, given in 1992 and 1994, comprised 65 percent performance-based tasks and 35 percent multiple-choice items. To take one state as an example, California's fourth-graders scored 80 percent or better on decoding and literal comprehension skills. Their scores plummeted, however, on the test sections that asked them to synthesize and create knowledge based on the information they had read.[7] The large gap between literal comprehension and reading as a component of critical thinking has U.S. educators concerned. Dennis Parker, an administrator for the U. S. Department of Education, says, "Reading now means reading, understanding, and thinking. If we just get better at teaching kids how to read without giving at least equal attention to teaching them how to think, we will see few if any gains over the next five years, and the public will be more disenchanted with us than ever."[8]

In order to address that component of critical thinking that is currently lacking in reading instruction in U.S. classrooms, researchers at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in Portland, Oregon, have identified six traits of critical reading. Stemming directly from research in assessment and instructional practices, these traits identify the six critical reading skills necessary to develop readers who can process knowledge from print material, make meaning out of it, and apply this meaning in other situations. These traits or knowledge areas are identified as conventions, comprehension, context, interpretation, synthesis, and evaluation. When used as an assessment framework, the six traits function as criteria of exemplary reading skills that can be identified and evaluated within students' responses to texts. As an instructional method, the traits can be taught in a classroom situation to address critical thinking development within a literature-based curriculum.

This type of multi-functional approach to connecting reading assessment and instruction is just beginning to be implemented at classroom, district, and state levels. Traditionally, assessment is implemented by outside evaluation processes using standardized tests that infrequently address the actual curriculum taught to students. One researcher says of this traditional approach to assessment: "It makes me think of exclusive language and/or representation of experiences that exclude or 'mystify' the student taking the exam."[9] Further, students are rarely, if ever, given clear target goals for performance in a given content area. Therefore, if we want higher performance in critical reading skills, we must align the criteria of excellent reading skills with instructional methodologies. When this "partnership" takes place, "the best assessments are those that are learning experiences themselves. Ideally, learning and assessment are blended together so skillfully that they are indistinguishable . . . a spiral that never ends—a seamless web in which assessment is woven invisibly into instruction."[10] With this premise in mind, this chapter addresses each of the six traits of critical reading and links them with support from contemporary reading theory to demonstrate that good reading assessment and instruction derive from exemplary criteria which serve as "target goals" for students and teachers.

Decoding Conventions: Theory

Good readers are empowered by recognizing the conventions of texts. Conventions in reading include grammar, punctuation, vernacular speech, genres, styles, forms, types and modes of texts. Readers must learn to recognize, identify, and distinguish the conventions that help create literal, figurative, inferential, and informational meanings. Ultimately, good readers understand and can articulate the architectural conventions of a text.

As a trait of critical reading, decoding conventions in reading means being able to talk or write with confidence in regard to the structures and organizational forms of texts. In a publication produced by the Center on English Learning and Achievement, one researcher describes the necessary use of conventions in reading to set up highly effective discussions in literature classrooms:

> The researchers found that establishing a consistent set of conventions for what was appropriate to discuss and how the discussion would be carried out was an

> important first step in creating a sense of coherence and purpose within the literature classroom. In some classes, for example, lectures might be used to introduce literary terminology, teacher-led discussions might direct the students in some sort of textual analysis, and small-group discussions might be used for exploring more personal responses to literature.[11]

Another description for the implementation of a consistent set of conventions is the idea of a "thinking frame," formulated by Bryce Hudgins, a professor of education at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. A "thinking frame" is defined as "a representation intended to guide the process of thought, supporting, organizing, and catalyzing the process."[12] To explain it in more concrete terms, as a reader learns the vocabulary of the conventions of reading—grammar, punctuation, vernacular speech, genres, styles, forms, types of characters, settings, plots, and modes of texts—the reader creates a series of "frames" inside of which he or she organizes information to aid comprehension. In short, the words a reader uses to describe the structure of a text aid comprehension and meaning-making by focusing the information. After learning to construct a frame, a reader internalizes the process by practicing the frame frequently in meaningful circumstances and then applying the frame and its organized contents in other contexts. Upon learning these "thinking frames," texts are more malleable for good readers.

In a California State Department of Education publication, effective readers are described as able to "connect with, reflect on, and challenge the text."[13] In order to do so, however, the creator of the assessment model lists the quality of "recognition of linguistic and structural complexities" (a sample thinking frame) as integral to excellent reading performance.

Other researchers have talked about decoding conventions in particular as a key trait in developing sophisticated reading ability. Thomas Bean, a reading researcher, states that "most people who are successful readers in high school and college have a well developed yet unconscious sense of how authors structure ideas in narrative texts."[14] This process involves an implicit grasp of the importance of textual conventions in directing the acquisition of meaning. Good readers employ organizational vocabulary, thinking frames and structural clues to enhance meaning. Bean lists the following categories as structure indicators for a narrative text: setting, initiating event, internal response, attempts, consequence, and reaction. Recognizing these structures of the narrative form helps readers predict and make meaning of events in narratives; the structures also combine to create a framework helpful for retrieving information.

Furthermore, as readers become more accustomed and attuned to structural cues in texts, they develop tacit understandings of texts based on signal words and dominant patterns designed to move the text along and initiate levels of meaning and interpretation. Bean concludes his essay with the comment that, "in essence, understanding an author's pattern of organization is a starting point, a foundation for creative, critical thinking."

In the informational text, readers still use structural clues to aid in meaning acquisition and creation. The informational forms of cause and effect, comparison/contrast, time order, problem/solution, and argument, for example, all serve as modes of texts that direct readers toward particular "readings" of those texts. Vicki Hancock defines "information literacy" as "an individual's ability to recognize a need for information, identify and locate appropriate information sources, know how to gain access to the information obtained in those sources, evaluate the quality of the information obtained, organize the information, and use the information effectively."[15] By incorporating the techniques of information literacy, readers are not held hostage by educational practices that traditionally functioned as information-holders and dispensers. Hancock goes on to say that "when teachers encourage students to do their own research, students take responsibility for their learning and are more effective consumers of information resources. They learn to recognize that information is packaged in a variety of ways, that it is packaged using a variety of techniques, that it serves a variety of interests, and that it contains a variety of value messages."

Bean and Hancock establish the importance of structural indicators to enable meaning to work within and upon the constructs of conventions. Further, the two researchers work together to demonstrate that, regardless of the types of genres, the use of structural knowledge to inform, develop, and define meaning is indicative of a resource-based learning experience. In this type of experience, not only does the reader use the conventions of text to develop meaning, he/she uses the skills of appropriate vocabulary, thinking frames, and structural knowledge to lay the groundwork for a purposeful, authentic, and responsible reading relationship where the student decides and directs the course of the reading within the boundaries of concrete criteria.

Decoding Conventions: Practice

The Stevenson students studied a poem entitled "The Democratic Order: Such Things in Twenty Years I Understood," by African American poet Alice Walker. The poem provided the text for discussion in order to assess students' ability to decode conventions. It is a short poem:

> My father
> (back blistered)
> beat me
> because I could not
> stop
> crying.
> He had
> enough 'fuss'
> he said
> for one
> voting day.[16]

The poem examines Alice Walker's change of perspective from her memories as a child to her knowledge as an adult. It is a poem that raises the hurtful issue of a father beating his child in frustration following his own beating on voting day. I was sleepless the night before I was to share the poem with my Stevenson readers. Was the topic too raw and adult to discuss? Could the children intellectually and emotionally handle the complex issues of racism, child abuse, and historical horror?

The meeting with the nine-year-old students laid my fears to rest. They came to the poem honestly and with serious faces, and Patty, their teacher, commented later, "I think that's the first time anyone in an academic situation raised an adult issue and asked for *their* response, *their* ideas, *their* values."[17] Prior to discussion, I wanted to assess their abilities to read purposefully in large, meaningful phrase groups that demonstrated a respect for the author's syntax. The students each took turns reading the poem aloud. I kept a ***teacher record*** of their oral readings, and I noted which students chose to read the title, include the author's name, read the text inside parenthesis, and enunciated the word "fuss" contained within quotation marks. The students then wrote an initial entry in their Reader's Notebook commenting on what they thought the poem meant. We then initiated a large group discussion of the textual conventions of the poem, commenting that the meaning was affected by the use of parenthesis to hide or distort the fact of the father's beating. The students articulated that other textual conventions—the use of quotation marks, vernacular speech, and a colon in the title—also changed the meaning of the poem. Branching out from our initial discussion of textual conventions, the student readers raised an important issue that had not been expressed in my eight years of teaching this particular poem to college students—that it was unfair from the child's perspective to be beaten for no particular reason. As young readers, they picked up on Walker's sense of powerlessness as a child; they too felt similar emotions. Adult readers, over the years, strangely limit their comments to the ironic fact that a beaten man beats his own daughter.

After completing ***teacher records*** on the students' individual oral readings, and a ***teacher record observation*** of our large group discussion, I asked the students to write again on the meaning of Walker's poem. In this ***extended response assessment*** I wanted to see how their knowledge and awareness of the textual conventions at play in the poem affected their comprehension. Ashlee commented in her pre-write, "This poem, 'Democratic Order,' makes you feel sad, lonely, and hurt. It makes you feel sorry for the writer. You just can't rush through it. It has to be read with expression." After our discussion of the poem and the textual conventions that impact its meaning, she wrote in her Reader's Notebook, "The reason Alice Walker's dad blistered her back was because she was crying too long. The reason that she was crying was because her father got hurt by white people. He didn't know why she was crying, that's why he hurt her."[18] In her pre-write, Ashlee appears concerned about covering all of her bases as a reader. She talks about how she feels about the poem. But, in her post-write, Ashlee visibly transacts with the poem, contending with the meaning, explaining it, and putting it in her own words. Bobby, in his pre-write, commented, "I think it was good that she explained her past and so it's not on her mind so much, and so she won't have to worry about it in the middle of her activities." But, in his post-write, Bobby likewise invests himself deeper in Walker's text, commenting in a rare burst of passion, "I think it was unnatural for her father to do that. I mean, why would you hit someone for caring about him? I think it was stupid of him to do that." [19]

Decoding Conventions: Suggested Assessment Tools

In assessing the children's responses to Walker's poem using the scoring guide for the reading trait "decoding conventions," I noted that the assessment tool of the ***teacher record*** (which is defined as a cumulative observed account of selected behavior), is an excellent way of keeping track of students' development in an informal way. As an ongoing accompaniment to more formal assessment methods, it charts both individual student growth and classroom growth as a whole. It can be as simple as notes jotted in a notebook during class discussions or as formal as a page assigned to each student and used to assess a student's oral reading and comprehension skills in student-teacher conferences.

A second tool that works well to assess for levels of confidence in particular readers and to "graph" or visualize where a student's strengths and weaknesses are in terms of deriving meaning from context and word clues is a ***miscue analysis***. This is a formal examination of fluidity, syntax recognition, and deviations from the text in oral reading. This is the assessment method we employed when we had the students read Walker's poem aloud. Although I did not use this tool as formally as I might have in other contexts, I felt it was interesting to see whether the students themselves picked up on their peer's misreadings during their oral reading. Informally, I did note that each "read-aloud" appeared stronger and more confident as the children listened to one another read.

A third tool that I recommend for assessing a reader's ability to decode textual conventions is the selected response assessment. This method carries over from more traditional assessment methods where teachers select test items for assessing basic comprehension through fill-in-the blanks, multiple-choice items, matching items, and word-recognition techniques. Often, this type of assessment provides a baseline evaluation of emerging reading skills.

Two final assessment tools for assessing a reader's ability to decode conventions are the short answer and the ***extended response*** tools. In these two types of assessment, teachers pose questions regarding the conventions of texts. A scoring guide is used to evaluate the quality of either a series of responses (short answer) or a single response (extended response). When using either of these methods, we recommend one of the

Traits of an Effective Reader Scoring Guides. Here is the decoding conventions rubric from the Reading a Literary Text Scoring Guide:

5 The advanced response demonstrates confidence in decoding conventions of literary texts and uses conventions information to form a thoughtful "thinking frame" of a text.

A score of five reflects that the response(s) directly answers the question(s) and uses appropriate text structure language in specific and precise ways. The response(s) selects an excellent example or several excellent examples to illustrate the reader's understanding of conventions. The examples are well-supported and the connections are clear. The response(s) also demonstrates a willingness and a desire to respond "beyond" the question(s) by building onto the initial question(s) and enlarging the thinking frame.

3 The developing response is growing in confidence in decoding conventions of the literary text and uses conventions information to form an initial "thinking frame" of the text.

A score of three reflects that the response(s) answers the question(s) generally and uses some basic text structure language appropriately. The response(s) can allude to a general example or examples from the text to illustrate the reader's understanding of the conventions. The response(s) is fairly safe and stays definitely within the confines of the question(s).

1 The emerging response is just beginning to decode conventions and oftentimes the challenge of decoding gets in the way of forming a "thinking frame" for the literary text.

A score of one reflects that the response(s) does not adequately answer the question(s) but may use text structure language to demonstrate some knowledge and application of decoding conventions. The response(s) does not usually provide an example (or examples) from the text but instead focuses on more general information. The response(s) can usually be characterized as sketchy and incomplete.

Ultimately, then, each of these methods discussed provides a different and very valuable picture of the reader's understanding and recognition of textual conventions at work in texts. Each provides a useful assessment of the reader's grasp of the importance of textual conventions upon textual meaning. Through using the multiple types of assessment tools, we can arrive at a deeper, more meaningful understanding of where individual students fall on the continuum of development in respect to decoding conventions.

Establishing Comprehension: Theory

Comprehension is a reader's creation of meaning from written text. As a key trait of effective reading, comprehension is defined as: a reader identifying and articulating facts, settings, actions, and characters in a text; a reader making predictions about what will happen next in the text; a reader identifying the "nuts and bolts" purpose of a text; and a reader identifying the main focus and specific details of a text to generate informed questions and comments. In essence, comprehension is creating meaning from written text to accurately understand what the writer is communicating.[20] In order to move beyond ideas of literal decoding with sight vocabulary, phonics instruction, and comprehension strategies designed to identify main idea and supporting details as isolated parts, not integral functions, of a text, researchers say that we must begin to understand that comprehension is, in one Stanwood, Washington, educator's terms, "not static. Comprehension fluctuates much like a radio wave. It becomes stronger or weaker based on the text, subject, and/or situations. Comprehension does not exist on an isolated level that remains constant all the time. Comprehension changes."[21]

Because comprehension is a mental process, it can only be observed indirectly. This dilemma is compounded by the fact that the mental process is an evolving one. However, as researchers we recognize that readers use a multitude of comprehension strategies in the process of constructing meaning from text: predicting, confirming, using prior knowledge, making comparisons, re-reading or reading ahead to deal with difficult ideas, visualizing, reading for a purpose, and self-monitoring for knowledge acquisition.[22] When the strategies are used together to deepen comprehension of a given text, "layers of meaning" are created. In the revised California state reading assessment model for 1992, researchers created a series of holistic strategies to identify the indicators of comprehension. Three of the indicators work together to demonstrate the idea of "layers of meaning." They are: (1) Readers demonstrate understanding of the work as a whole; (2) Through the process of alluding to and/or retelling specific passages readers validate or expand ideas; and (3) Readers retell, summarize, or paraphrase with purpose.[23] Upon implementing each of these three steps, a reader creates meaning from a text that encompasses both breadth and depth, and comprehension has become critical thinking as it moves beyond the literal decoding of past definitions.

In the literature review of research on comprehension as a critical reading skill, researchers supported the contention that comprehension is indeed a higher-thinking skill.[24] In fact, Harry Singer, a reading researcher, discusses two types of comprehension students develop when directed toward a more critical reading of texts:

> Recently the term metacognition has been used to describe two types of knowledge a reader employs in learning from text. The first type of metacognitive knowledge a reader employs involves monitoring comprehension. In short, the alert reader continually monitors whether or not information in the text is making sense. A second type of metacognitive knowledge explored in the present study involves the regulation of cognition through a well-developed repertoire of reading strategies.[25]

As we discussed earlier, comprehension is a mental process, and readers develop "ways of reading" that enable them to retain information, make sense of the information read, and conceptualize ideas and theories in the context of the text itself. Singer describes a process similar to the mental comprehension process I just described, in which "a diagrammatic strategy forces the reader to transform linear prose into nonlinear hierarchical representation. Information that is organized hierarchically is generally easier to retain and retrieve than a linear structure . . . additionally, graphically organizing material entails deep processing in order to reorganize the material and depict interrelationships among ideas." In order to produce the "deep processing" and "interrelationships among ideas" that Singer describes, readers mentally have to organize the information from a text to abstract, integrate, and retain the concepts contained within the text. Toward that end, Singer advocates a process of mentally organizing textual material by:

(1) Selection—devise a topic sentence that organizes the material around a central theme
(2) Question—formulate three mental questions based on your topic idea
(3) Conclusion—mentally address your questions to the topic idea and apply the knowledge of the text to reach your conclusion[26]

Incorporating comprehension "attack" strategies into the reading process results in students who will read and comprehend with purpose; they will sort unimportant information from critical information; they will actively seek understanding by creating an organizing framework in which the critical comprehension can take place.

One final aspect of comprehending as a critical reading skill involves the use of recognizing types of knowledge domains. A knowledge domain is defined as an area of knowledge where the reader has some level of understanding and processing ability. Tina Anderson says, "It is obvious that many domains of knowledge participate in guiding the comprehension of prose. Some domains of knowledge can be identified by virtually everyone, whereas other domains are not very obvious and can be identified only when there is a theoretical understanding of comprehension mechanisms."[27] Anderson lists the six most frequently used knowledge domains: linguistic, rhetorical, causal, intentional, spatial, and roles, personalities, and objects. When reading a text, a knowledge domain will be activated by a clue in a text. In the linguistic domain, familiarity with written language is the immediate clue; however, if a text contains a foreign language or mathematical symbols, the knowledge domain may be further down the continuum of expertise. For an experienced reader, invocation of the knowledge domain where he/she is more of an "expert" produces more precise comprehension. Thus, an experienced reader will choose texts that support his/her knowledge domains. If confronted with a text full of unknown knowledge domains, an intuitive reader will incorporate other comprehension skills to compensate for the low level of expertise on the continuum of knowledge domains in the unknown areas.

As the literature review has noted, comprehension is more than a literal retelling of texts. Deep, purposeful comprehension emerges when readers create "layers of meaning" for themselves through comprehension strategies. Further, when confronted with a seemingly impenetrable text, good readers can invoke their critical reading ability by defining their tasks, formulating their strategies for engaging with the text, monitoring their progress throughout the text, and validating their conclusions by posing questions to themselves and to the text.

Establishing Comprehension: Practice

In the Stevenson pilot, we used Eve Bunting's 1995 Caldecott Medal-winning text, ***Smoky Night***, as our literal comprehension text for study. The book is another text that demands great involvement on the reader's part. The story focuses on a young boy's thoughts, fears, and perspectives on a night of rioting and looting in South Central Los Angeles. Eve Bunting comments on this, one of her most moving stories, saying, "Because I live in Los Angeles County I was close to the awful city riots in 1992. I wondered what it would be like to be a child in those riots . . . . It is a sad book, but at the end I try to show something important; if people get to know each other they may like each other. And then they won't need to fight."[28]

Again, in choosing assessment models to test the reading trait "establishing comprehension," I kept the student's responses, perspectives, and points of view center stage. Before we began reading, I held up the hard cover picture book and asked, "Does anyone have a prediction for this book?"

The students looked mystified for a moment, and then one hesitantly replied, "Well, it looks like it's about a boy and a cat."

"Yes, yes," I said encouragingly. "What else?"

"Well, the title says 'Smoky Night'; I bet it's about a fire at night," another student spoke up.

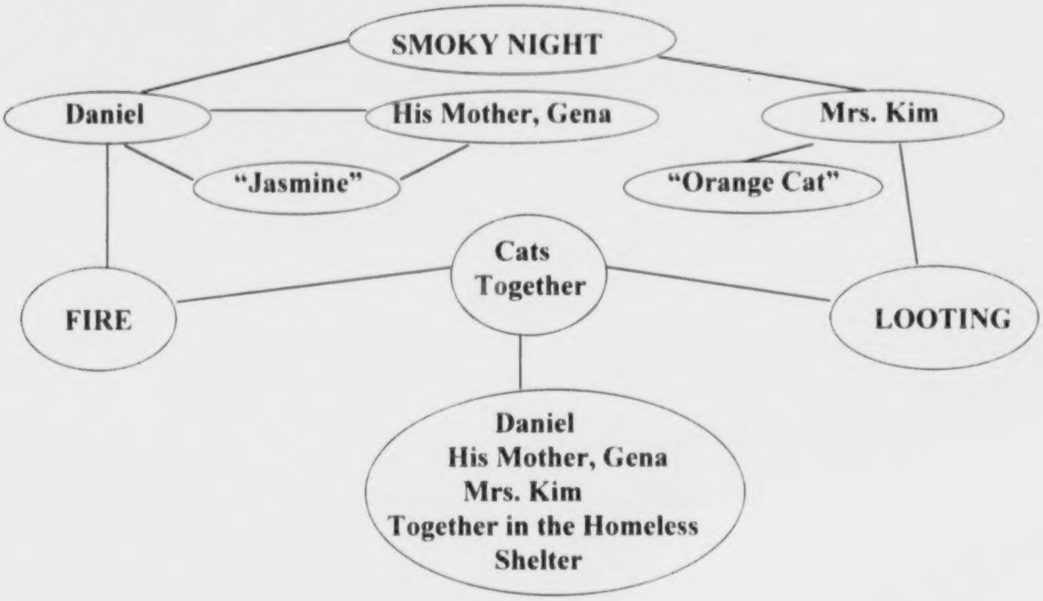
"Excellent," I replied, all the while thinking to myself, *Can't they dig a little deeper? I know they are capable of it.*

"Well," Andrew, the quietest member of our group, said, "I predict that the book is about a boy and his cat who get lost and feel sad on a smoky night."

Now we're getting somewhere, I thought. During this week's session, I audiotaped the students and myself talking for the entire 90 minutes. I wanted to assess—later, in my office—what a reading conversation looks like on paper, as opposed to hearing and participating in it at the same time. I read the book out loud to the students, and trusting their instincts to self-assess, self-monitor for meaning, and search for comprehension through questions and problem-solving out loud, I allowed them to whisper quietly to one another as I read. And I often paused and waited for the students to comment or make another prediction that indirectly revealed strategies readers employed when seeking literal comprehension from texts. Through my listening to the self-monitoring of their comprehension, I learned that students use titles, familiar vocabulary, background information, and textual pictures to create a comprehension map in their thinking. I discovered that not only do students "pre-read" by studying the book's title, cover, author's name, illustrations, and other meaningful symbols (one boy noticed the gold foil Caldecott Medal on the cover and predicted that it must be a very good book because it had won a prize), but they also constantly assess for comprehension—take their "comprehension temperature," so to speak—by mentally checking facts against perceptions, by updating and literally "revising" earlier predictions, by using context clues, and by listening and respecting other people's comments.

I wanted to see if I could "capture" their comprehension of *Smoky Night*, so I explained the reading activity we were going to use to help us understand the book. "Say Anything" is a whole group reading task that encourages students to self-assess in an ongoing, read-aloud experience. As I read the text aloud, there were moments when I would stop reading, turn to the students, and whisper, "Say anything." This was their cue to turn to their neighbor, make a prediction, ask a question, evaluate a detail, or identify a turning moment. Their predictions and comments were so successful that I asked them then to begin thinking about details and sorting those details into "significant moments" and " supporting moments." With this vocabulary in place, they began talking so enthusiastically about different moments in the story that I had to put the book down and raise my voice to get their attention. But, in that loud, crazy moment, I realized that they were employing their reading strategies to evaluate the text and to defend their interpretations based on their "readings" (understandings) of the text's material. They allowed me to finish the story, but they continued their spirited discussions concerning the significant and less important details of the story.

As I returned to my research later, I realized that what the Stevenson kids were creating through their raucous discussion was an assessment tool called a ***graphic organizer***. The graphic organizer created by the group's discussion that day finally evolved into a pictorial diagram of the book's purpose, composed of selected and significant details that directly influenced the story's message. A ***graphic organizer*** of our "reader's conversation" concerning Smoky Night is illustrated on the following page.



An analysis of the ***graphic organizer*** depicted above is as follows: The students worked from the title *Smoky Night* and decided that it was the main focus of the story. This "smoky night" full of smoke, fire, looting, and crazy behavior established the opportunity for Daniel, his mother Gena, and their neighbor, Mrs. Kim, to get beyond their mutual distrust and bond together in the wake of the destruction of their neighborhood. So, as the next line illustrates, Daniel and Gena are connected by lines of communication, but they are not connected to Mrs. Kim. Further, their two cats—Jasmine, Daniel's cat; and Orange Cat, Mrs. Kim's cat—mirror the problematic relationship between the humans. However, in the next line, the Stevenson students decided that the fire and looting were the catalysts that brought the cats together. Further, when the cats bond together to hide from the fire, their bonding causes the three humans to make friends. What is so interesting about this ***graphic organizer*** is the fact that the students had to work together to create it, sorting details, making decisions, and paring down their ideas to reach a clear, graphic picture that they all agreed captured what *Smoky Night* was all about.

Although the conversation that day was wild, impassioned, and loud, both Patty Price and I were delighted that the students seemed to be developing confidence in themselves as readers. It appeared that through providing them with a vocabulary for reading traits—making predictions, sorting details, looking for and revising clues—we had finally enabled them to organize their comprehension and articulate the text's basic comprehension elements with confidence. They went from making hesitant, general comments to stating specific, text-dependent comments. Finally, in their Reader's Notebooks at the end of the session, the more skilled readers were moving beyond literal comprehension to place the text in a larger philosophical context. In his written response, a boy named Mychal states, "This book is a story about how enemies become friends and how a fire affects a city."[29] Andrew's comment, too, reveals a world vision enlarged by his understanding of the relationship of the parts of the text to the whole. He comments, "In *Smoky Night* it was about how you don't know what someone is like until you know them."[30]

Establishing Comprehension: Suggested Assessment Tools

Ultimately, then, in conjunction with the scoring guide for the reading strategy of literal comprehension, we recommend the ***teacher record*** of a class discussion with frequent open-ended questions as a companion piece to the retelling, an assessment method that uses discourse analysis to measure comprehension, because it encourages the student to sort details by importance and to see a larger context for literal comprehension of the text. The ***cloze exercise***, an assessment of a reader's ability to restore omitted portions of oral or written text by reading its remaining content, works well as a "trouble-shooter" assessment method to assess on the scoring guide a student's present level of basic comprehension. Also, a ***graphic organizer***, a diagram or pictorial device that displays relationships between textual elements for both whole-group assessment and individual student assessment, offers a wonderful alternative for reaching and assessing the many strategies and skills students employ in creating literal comprehension of a text's meaning.

Two final assessment tools for assessing a reader's ability to establish comprehension are the *short answer* and the ***extended response*** tools. In these two types of assessment, teachers pose questions regarding the comprehension of texts. A scoring guide is used to evaluate the quality of either a series of responses (*short answer*) or a single response (***extended response***). When using either of these methods, we recommend one of the Traits of an Effective Reader Scoring Guides. Here is the establishing comprehension rubric from the Reading a Literary Text Scoring Guide:

5 The advanced response demonstrates a purposeful, expansive, and knowledgeable comprehension of a literary text.

A score of five reflects that the response(s) confidently and directly answers the specific question(s) using comprehension terms to indicate precise understandings. The response(s) selects an excellent example (or examples) to illustrate the reader's indepth comprehension. Examples chosen are well-developed using clear and specific language and terms. The response(s) also demonstrates a willingness and a desire to respond "beyond" the question(s) by building onto the initial question(s) and increasing comprehension of a literary text into inferential and interpretative levels.

3 The developing response demonstrates an adequate comprehension of a literary text. Purposeful comprehension is still evolving.

A score of three reflects that the response(s) answers the question(s) in general ways using some comprehension terms to indicate general understandings. The response(s) may select an example or examples to illustrate the reader's literal comprehension. Examples chosen are somewhat "safe" and obvious choices. The response(s) do not venture beyond the initial question(s).

1 The emerging response is searching to establish a basic comprehension of a literary text.

A score of one reflects that the response(s) does not adequately answer the question(s). The response(s) does not provide examples for evidence but sometimes restates the question using the same words. It is not evident if a basic comprehension of a literary text has been achieved. The response(s) can be characterized as sketchy and incomplete.

Realizing Context: Theory

Readers who recognize context in texts explore multiple layers of meaning. They see psychological and cultural nuances in texts; they recognize their own set of complexities they bring to texts. Readers examine the degree of fit between the author's ideas or information and their own prior knowledge or experience. Recognizing and valuing contextual aids in texts, readers identify tone, purpose, and context. Readers recognize that there is a relationship and communication between the author and the reader, and that the mediating factor is the text. Realizing context involves literally the recognition of social and cultural factors in texts—it is walking in the author's shoes.

Recognizing context in reading is hierarchically more difficult than the two previously discussed traits, conventions, and comprehension. Context within a text allows for reader manipulation of the text. It can be most easily understood as a dialogue of negotiation. Lil Brannon defines it this way: "We begin reading any text with an implicit faith in its coherence, an assumption that its author intended to convey some meaning and made the choices most likely to convey the meaning effectively."[31] This "implicit faith" is our first and strongest impulse as readers. We want to believe in the message of the text; we want to acknowledge the authority of the author. Brannon says, "We tolerate a writer's manipulation of the way we see the subject that is being addressed. Our tolerance derives from a tacit acceptance of the author's 'authority' to make the statements we are reading." Yet, as readers, when we grow and begin to question the contexts of texts, we gain rather than lose in the process. Brannon holds that "if readers and writers can exchange information about intention and effect, they can negotiate ways to bring actual effect as closely in line with desired intention as possible." This "exchange of information" that Brannon describes should be visualized as a silent dialogue the reader has with a text during the process of reading. A reader searching for and questioning context is a responsible, committed reader.

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA) developed a joint task force in 1993 to develop standards for assessment in writing and reading. One of their report's statements serves as an excellent definition of the task of searching for intention: "Like a living organism, reading exists only in interaction with others, in a social interdependence. Reading is a system of signs through and within which we represent and make sense of the world and of ourselves. Text does not contain meaning; rather, meaning lies in the social relationship within which reading occurs."[32] This "social relationship" decribes the interactive process between reader and text or reader, text, and author. When reading for context, the reader is not a passive collector of information; rather, the reading experience creates an opportunity for transaction. Thus, in Glennellen Pace's words, "reader and text within a particular context are both changed as meaning is constructed. We are forced to acknowledge a reader's home discourses, schemas, and personal histories, as prime contributors on the reader's part."[33]

This contention that not only do we read for the intentions of the author, but that we also read with the awareness that we, as readers, bring contexts to the text, is an exciting idea. Although this acknowledgment of reader context brings to mind a "Pandora's box" of assessment bias and distortion concerns, a reminder to see the trait of context as a "dialogue of negotiation" will enable teachers, students, and assessors to "recognize diversity of strengths—differing discourse styles across languages and dialects represent reading strengths. There are multiple literacies—purposes and ways of knowing. They represent our ability to function effectively in a pluralistic and global society."[34] Ultimately, when the idea of diversity of strengths is realized, we will see a recognition of the power of "community" in reading. Joseph Harris, a reading and writing researcher, says:

> One only begins to understand the place one has come from through the act of leaving it. Thus, the task of the student is imagined as one of crossing the border from one community of discourse to another, of taking on a new sort of language. We must ask our students to work within and against both their own language and the text they are reading. The move then is not simply from one discourse to another but towards a hesitant and tenuous relationship to both. Such a pedagogy helps remind us that the borders of most discourses are hazily marked and often traveled, and that the communities they define are thus often indistinct and overlapping.[35]

With Harris's words in mind, we recognize the trait of context as vital to the idea of critical reading ability. Further, with its placement in the Traits of an Effective Reader assessment model, we acknowledge that the process of reading is an active process of meaning, that it is dynamic and changing, that it builds upon a student's cultural, intellectual, and linguistic experiences, and ultimately, that reading is a profoundly social act.

Realizing Context: Practice

In the Stevenson pilot, the session on context began with the children begging to make more predictions about books. Their confidence was high after the previous week's experience, so I pulled nine books out of my briefcase and asked the kids to open their Reader's Notebooks.

"Write on this page your favorite things to do, where you live, and what is an important value to you," I instructed. A few of them looked at me inquisitively, and I motioned to their papers. "Go ahead, you'll see in a moment."

After they finished writing down the contexts they bring to a text, we began making predictions about the nine books sitting on the table in front of us. Every time we decided that a particular book appeared to describe birds, singing, tortilla making, or art, I instructed the readers to consult their Reader's Notebooks to see whether any of the intentions matched, complemented one another, or provided a contrast. Pretty soon, they caught on to the instructional method behind my thinking, and they branched out from literal comprehension predictions to contextual predictions. In a short time, each student had selected a book he or she had previewed and predicted for context.

Silent reading commenced. A few students finished early, and I encouraged them to write their understanding of the book in their Reader's Notebooks. Some time later, all of the students had finished their initial reading.

"Now, find a partner and describe your book to them. Tell them especially why you felt this book reflected something important about you or opened your eyes to something unusual and interesting." Their talking was quiet and muted. But, as I passed around the table listening to their quiet conversations, I realized that, as opposed to our literal comprehension discussion where we were all attempting to reach a joint understanding of a single text, this time, each student felt the responsibility to put the text into context for his or her peer partner. Conversations did not have to be loud and spirited for students to feel enthusiastic about literature. Capturing the context of the books called forth a different reading behavior from the student readers. Amanda, writing of the book *Feathers and Fools*, said, "The book made feel kind of sad. I think she [Mem Fox, the author] probably felt like nothing could stop her from writing this book, and so that made this book very important and interesting."[36] Mychal, writing of *Feathers and Fools* as well, said, "It made me feel like 'true friends' who have battles. I think she felt as if she was writing a novel on war."[37] Both comments—intuitive, insightful, and thoughtful—were reached as the students extended themselves into the text. Both Alan and Andrew, writing collaboratively on the heavy use of Southern vernacular in the book *White Socks Only*, noted that "this book makes me feel funny, weird. I want to understand it, but the way they talk makes it hard."[38] Rather than seeing this comment as an indication that the student readers could not comprehend the book, I saw that by focusing on the trait of realizing context, I was asking them to use a different type of thinking to access the text's message. Because they had been asked to bring themselves, their interests, their values to the books, these readers felt called upon to respond to the text with insight.

Realizing Context: Suggested Assessment Tools

From this experience, I researched assessment methods that would help students focus their thinking during the assessment of searching for intended meanings in texts. Two alternative methods of assessment—***constructed response*** and ***extended response***—provide two opportunities for students to express clearly and thoughtfully the reading trait of realizing context. In ***constructed response***, students are given careful directions to help develop their written or oral organization of the material in regard to expressing the intended meanings. They are asked to specifically display knowledge and application of that knowledge. For example, in *Feathers and Fools*, a teacher facilitator might ask students to respond in their Reader's Notebooks to the question: "What is one moment or detail in the book that illustrates how the author feels about the events of the book? Construct a response in which you 'frame' your answer by describing the moment, the context that creates it, and the ways you believe the author reveals how he or she feels about the book's message."

In a restricted scope response, the teacher/facilitator might select one specific moment or detail from the book and ask the students to "focus on the moment when the swan flies over the heads of the peacocks with a reed for her nest in her mouth. Restrict your comments to this moment, but describe in deep detail how this moment reveals intended meaning in the book." Both methods, restricted in scope and designed to elicit a thoughtful response, serve as catalysts to help students pull forth the meanings they bring to the reading and the ones they recognize in the text. They are assessment tools designed to create an optimal environment for producing the reading trait of realizing context. As I learned from the experience with literal comprehension, if you give students the vocabulary—or, in contextual terms, the frame to construct or the scope to address—students can and will respond with deep and thoughtful insight.

To give students the best possible opportunity for success with ***constructed response*** and restricted scope assessments, I would recommend the use of qualitative and quantitative tasks and tools. Both of these methods allow students to self-assess their placement on the continuum of realizing context in texts. Both are student-driven, with facilitator feedback. A scoring guide is used to evaluate the quality of either a series of responses (short answer) or a single response (***extended response).*** When using either of these methods, we recommend one of the Traits of an Effective Reader Scoring Guides. Here is the realizing context rubric from the Reading a Literary Text Scoring Guide:

5 The advanced response realizes context and sees inferential meanings and intended purposes, both implicit and explicit.

A score of five reflects that the response(s) directly and specifically answers the question(s) using appropriate context terms to demonstrate understanding of inferential meaning. The response(s) uses a clear and well-chosen example or examples to illustrate understandings of contextual issues. The response(s) goes beyond the question's limits and extends into an indepth understandings of contextual relationships in literary texts.

3 The developing response realizes the context of the literary text to some degree and recognizes obvious types of inference.

A score of three reflects that the response(s) generally answers the question(s) and uses some context terminology to show a basic level of understanding. The response(s) may use an example or examples to illustrate understanding. The response(s) usually stays within the safe confines of the question.

1 The emerging response guesses at context, but has difficulty accessing inferential types of knowledge.

A score of one reflects that the response(s) does not adequately address the question(s). The response(s) does not use examples from the text to illustrate inferential understandings. Sometimes the question is just restated using the same words. There is not enough evidence to decide if the reader understood the contextual layers of the literary text.

Developing Interpretation: Theory

Interpretation produces "invested readers." Readers interpret texts to satisfy, extend, and expand personal and academic interests. Readers who interpret texts employ these skills: They "fill in gaps,"real or imagined; they use clues and evidence from the text to draw conclusions; they make plausible interpretations of ideas, facts, concepts, and/or arguments; they recognize and deal with ambiguities in texts, often settling the disparities through thoughtful interpretation; they revise, reshape, and/or deepen earlier interpretation; they reflect on the meaning of the text, including larger or more universal significance; they express a major understanding about or insight into a subject, an aspect of self, or of the text's connection to life in general.[39]

Interpretation is one of the most widely accepted skills of critical thinking attributed to the act of reading. However, how many times in the classroom has the teacher asked a question designed to elicit an interpretative response, only to be faced with a sea of blank faces? As one educator put it, "It's not that my students can't answer the question. Given appropriate clues, they don't have a problem finding the answer, but constantly tailoring questions to a particular text would create a dependence on me I wanted to avoid; I wanted to nurture independent learners."[40] In order to create the opportunity for independent learning, and thus critical thinking, students need to be allowed to develop a "hands-on" approach to interpreting texts. Alexa Anna Lindquist calls this process "application." She says, "Allow the students to transfer ideas into another setting so that students can interpret the way an idea is used in a story to a way the same idea relates to their lives." Although this instructional approach seems somewhat simplistic in terms of creating interpretative, thoughtful readers, it is a starting point. It is helpful if we view it as the "comfort zone." Once initial interpretation is established in the comfort zone, students begin to gain confidence and branch out into more sophisticated interpretative modes—academic, philosophical, social, religious, and so forth.

Developing interpretations of a given text requires the reader to go beyond the initial impression to develop a more complete and complex understanding. Bryce Hudgins describes interpretation as "the reasonable assessment of statements, and also the disposition to give evidence in support of conclusions and to require such a justification by others before they [readers] are willing to accept a conclusion."[41] If we recognize interpretation as jointly reader-based and text-based, then we are nudging readers forward in interpretative skills to potential synthesis when they will use textual evidence to support ideas and connections. However, before synthesis can be employed upon textual material, interpretation must be used spontaneously by the reader to "invest" in the text. Hudgins comments, "If he or she must be prompted to interpret, the child's critical thinking remains dependent upon an external agent, such as a teacher, and does not meet the criteria of what we mean by self-directed critical thinking."

Thus, the process of interpretation must follow this journey in order to propel our learners into becoming critical thinkers: (1) the interpretation is reflective and purposeful, grounded initially in ideas that are "investing" for him or her; (2) the initial interpretation initiates the process of inquiry; and (3) the reader takes the initial interpretation and enlarges it, expands it, connects it to an interpretation of larger significance. By following this path to thoughtful interpretation, students will search for relevant meaning. By changing the practice of interpretation from a memorized or formulaic skill into a transacted skill of experimentation, of choice, of comfort, of exploration, we "teach our students to fish instead of catching them a fish."[42] Judith Langer, a reader-response critic, comments on the subtle shift in responsibility from teacher-driven interpretation to student-driven interpretation: "Students' 'envisionments'—the shifting understandings they have as they read and discuss literature—are crucial to their understanding of text. Help students trust and explore their own responses to text; students learn to value the open-ended literary experience. They develop increasingly complex responses and apply analytical tools to texts as well."[43] In essence, then, research supports the contention that interpretation is a critical thinking activity; however, for it to become a self-directed critical reading activity, we must hand the process back to the student. Just as we allow for revision in writing, we must allow for revision in thinking. By doing so, we open up opportunities for students to develop capable, supple minds that can, given a new situation (or a new text), learn to engage with the process of interpretation—calling it their own—and draw upon the familiar strength of their own experiences, personalities, culture, and values as they make thoughtful interpretations of texts.

Developing Interpretation: Practice

In the Stevenson pilot, the students and I discussed the strategy of interpretation after a two-week break in which I was conducting workshops out of state. The children were glad to see me again, and I was pleased to be back in the classroom where I could see the actual traits of reading at work in the students' thoughts, comments, and written response. I had selected a book for discussion that I had picked up on my travels. *Forbidden Talent* is the boyhood autobiography of Navajo painter Redwing Nez. Once again, we followed our familiar routine of making predictions about the book's purpose, subject, message, and context. The children seemed a little hesitant about the title.

"Mrs. Thompson," a girl named Blair called, raising her hand and speaking at the same time, "how can something like the talent be wrong?" Her face looked troubled.

"Well, Blair, I'm glad you asked that question," I replied. "We're going to talk about a reading trait today that is called interpretation. Part of knowing how to interpret books means making decisions, judgments, and plain old guesses about what something might mean."

"Oh." A collective shaking of heads ensued, and visible anxiety furrowed the brows of the students.

"How about this," I suggested. "How about we decide right now that there are no wrong answers to questions I might ask you about this book; I want us to 'problem-solve' out loud together."

With this instructional parameter established, the students appeared relieved. We clustered around the table with the children sitting alongside me and standing up next to me. I wanted to remove the teacher-student barrier of my appearing to "instruct" from in front. I wanted to remove that barrier physically, so we gathered together, looking over one another's shoulders as we took turns reading the book aloud.

It was a difficult book. Similar to our reading experience with *Smoky Night*, we stopped often and discussed problems that needed to be solved in the book. We noted places where the text seemed to contradict itself. We attempted to sort details to explain actions by the characters or the turn of an event. There was much silence during these moments, and I willed myself not to push them with leading questions. Learning how to interpret a text from within the self requires practice, thoughtful revision, and a willingness to listen to others. So I listened.

After we had read the book and talked about it thoroughly, I asked the students to respond in their Reader's Notebooks. Patty and I were then surprised to see the kids waver. During the other sessions they could hardly wait to begin writing about the books, but this time they hesitated putting pen to paper.

"What's wrong?" I finally asked.
"It's hard," they replied. "We know what we talked about, but it's hard to put it in our own words."

"Okay," I said, "let's draw it." I went up to the board and drew circles all over it, leaving room for text inside each bubble. "Someone give me a problem in the text," I asked.

"The grandfather doesn't want Ashkii to paint," Bobby commented.

"Okay, good problem," I said. "Now what are the reasons the book suggests for this problem?" I asked and pointed to each of the empty bubbles surrounding the one I had called Ashkii's "problem."

"His grandfather says it goes against the Ancient Ones," Mychal suggested.

"His grandfather says it should be used only to support his family," Blair called out.

"They tell him it's a waste of time," Alan said softly. Alan, the reader most hesitant in our group to expose his ideas to scrutiny, was obviously interested in the book, but his tendency to protect himself was fighting with his desire to be involved in the discussion.

"Are they right, Alan?" I said, turning to look at him. "Is it a waste of his time?"

"No," Alan said shaking his head. "Ashkii doesn't think it's a waste, either. That's why he put chalk colors on the dog and the horse, why he brands the sheep with black paint, and why he scratches designs in the water tanks. He's trying to express himself. He's trying to show his grandfather that he's an artist." It all came out in a rush, and when Alan finished speaking, his friends sitting next to him patted him on the back.

"Now, write it in your notebook, Alan," I said and turned back to the blackboard to fill in the bubbles with Alan's "reasons" behind Ashkii's "problems." I wanted to congratulate Alan, I wanted to stop the whole session to tell him how proud I was of him, but I knew I needed to show the other students that they, too, could interpret texts. Together, we filled in all of the bubbles on the blackboard. We had created an interpretative ***graphic organizer*** of the book, and the visible "filling in of the circles" seemed to be the bridge to allow the students to mentally "fill in the gaps" of the text.

Once again, through the process of assessing a reading trait in students' responses, I learned how invaluable it is to model the process of a particular reading behavior. Students want to know what the target is in order to structure their responses effectively. I wanted my Stevenson kids to interpret. But to do so, they had to see what interpretation looks like.

Developing Interpretation: Suggested Assessment Tools

In addition to the ***graphic organizer*** assessment tool, I believe that reader's records as classroom assessment methods allow students time and space to experiment with ideas in a non-threatening situation. Also, group interviews and group presentations are valid methods of assessing student invocation of the reading trait interpretation. In respect to the scoring guide for interpretation, as readers move up the continuum of interpretative skills, they learn to trust their own opinions, to invoke textual convention and literal comprehension strategies in order to develop sound, purposeful interpretations, and hold in the balance the option of revising, deepening, and even reshaping interpretations.

Ultimately, assessing the trait of developing interpretation involves a four-step process: (1) identify a problem, gap or ambiguity in a text; (2) gather clues and evidence from the text to address the problem; (3) make an interpretation statement that resolves the problem using the clues and evidence; and (4) connect your interpretation to the bigger picture.

Two final tools for assessing a reader's ability to develop interpretations are the short answer and the ***extended response*** tools. In these two types of assessment, teachers pose questions regarding the interpretation of texts. A scoring guide is used to evaluate the quality of either a series of responses (short answer) or a single response (***extended response***). When using either of these methods, we recommend one of the Traits of an Effective Reader Scoring Guides. Here is the developing interpretation rubric from the Reading a Literary Text Scoring Guide:

5 The advanced response interprets to analyze and think critically about literary texts.

A score of five reflects that the response(s) directly answers the question(s) using specific evidence, clues, and "on-target" information. The response(s) uses appropriate language that reflects an indepth understanding of the skills of interpretation. Examples, quotes, and events are cited from the text and connected strongly to the analysis. The response(s) moves beyond the question(s), engages the bigger picture—a literary framework of historical significance, cultural importance, or universal theme.

3 The developing response interprets to expand the text, but is still developing the connections to a larger world view.

A score of three reflects that the response(s) generally answers the question using some language that indicates an initial layer of interpretation understanding. The response(s) is generally safe, and cites very obvious examples from the text. Connections between the examples and the analysis are not always evident. The response(s) does not yet move beyond the question. Engaging the "bigger picture" is still a developing skill.

1 The emerging response sees interpretation as "talking about a book." Reading and interpreting are still separate processes.

A score of one reflects that the response(s) does not adequately address the question(s). The response does not cite examples, quotes, or evidence from the literary text to use as a basis for interpretation. Sometimes the question is just restated using the same words. There is not enough evidence of interpretation skill to accurately judge whether the student understands the concept of interpretation.

Integrating for Synthesis: Theory

Good readers synthesize information and ideas from written text to compare and extend meaning from multiple sources.[44] They show sensitivity to the structure of the text; they understand and can articulate how parts of the text work together, inform one another, or contradict one another. They synthesize texts to demonstrate how a text changes, develops, informs itself, in essence, builds meaning. Good readers grapple with texts through the process of synthesizing and emerge with grounded, defensible knowledge. Readers take a text apart and compare information with contextual knowledge. They make connections. They extend meaning beyond a text's literal boundaries. Good readers compare and contrast the ideas and points of multiple authors. They critically review their reactions to an author's ideas and point of view from the perspective of their own ideas, experiences, and knowledge. They often develop research on content areas based on a synthesis of multiple sources of information. The best readers can synthesize information and texts across the curriculum and across content areas.

Similar to interpretation, the critical thinking skill of synthesis in reading is process-oriented and dependent upon students developing confidence in the skill before becoming proficient at it. John Hattie[45] says that the task of reading can be construed as "interventionist" in design. In other words, students combine learning and reading by synthesizing the two experiences. One process interrupts the other in order to inform it.

When we apply Hattie's ideas to the process of synthesis, his hierarchical development of synthesis as a process of critical thinking has interesting ramifications. His theory is as follows. At the base level, he sees synthesis as "unistructural. It intervenes based on one relevant feature or dimension. Its target parameter is an individual characteristic, skill or technique." As an example, a reader just beginning his or her education in the process of synthesizing materials might compare two poems on the basis of their similar titles or subjects, or contrast two 19th-century novels based on their historical proximity.

Hattie's second level of development is called "multistructural": "A multistructural intervention involves a range of independent strategies or procedures, but without any integration or orchestration as to individual differences or demands of content or context." An example of this type of synthesis would be the comparison of several poems across the range of a given area, yet with scant attention to differences. The reader may attempt to focus just on one aspect of the common traits among the poems and yet would not address the ways they are different.

Hattie's third level of synthesis is called "relational": "All the components in a relational intervention are integrated to suit the individual's needs, are orchestrated to the demands of a particular task and content, and are strictly regulated to stay within the bounds of discretion." In this type of synthesis, the reader groups poems so forcefully due to similarities that he or she does not allow for the subtleties or individual characteristics of the poems to have their own voice. It is a reader attempting to coerce the synthesis as opposed to allowing his or her interpretation and intention to have some interplay within the response to the text.

The highest level of synthesis on Hattie's scale of development is called "the extended abstract." This is the level of synthesis we are trying to develop in "good" readers, in which "the integration achieved in the previous category is generalized to a new domain." At this level of synthesis, the comparisons, dissimilarities, or integration of knowledge between and among texts is so well done that it literally creates a "new text" fraught with its own voice, intention, interpretation, and evaluation. It is a wonderful melding of primary and secondary sources, of inquiry and knowledge, of thoughtful and analytical prose. These types of extended abstracts can be seen in the "A" research paper or the valedictorian's reflection on high school education. The finest example of synthesis would demonstrate how to sort and reconstruct textual concepts in order to depict their interrelationships within a plurality of texts.

Integrating for Synthesis: Practice

In the Stevenson pilot, I approached the week's session on synthesis with more than a little concern. I knew that the session on interpretation had really challenged the student readers; I was afraid that the last two reading strategies, synthesis and evaluation, were going to be difficult to assess because they are highly sophisticated reading behaviors.

Because of the complexity of the synthesis trait, I faxed ahead a chapter entitled "Nativity" from a Gary Paulsen book of nonfiction essays for young adults. Patty arranged for the children to read the lengthy passage ahead of time and to study and discuss certain vocabulary words. The chapter focuses on the relationship between Paulsen, a dogsled driver, and his lead dog, Cookie. Cookie is due to have puppies, and the chapter describes the communication that takes place between Paulsen and Cookie as one of her puppies is stillborn. The prose is sophisticated, using vocabulary such as "conceived," "negotiated," "gestation," "dubious," "paradoxically," "hindrance," "dehydrate," "murderous," and "anesthetic." But the story is beautifully rich and simply told. Quite plainly, Cookie is a mother, and Paulsen comes to realize that her ability to grieve the loss of her child parallels the feelings of loss and despair experienced by humans. It is a deeply moving book, and knowing the Stevenson students' sensitivity to issues of critical insight, I wanted to give them the opportunity to experience this text.

On the day of the session, I brought with me one of my own children's books entitled *Baby Wolf*. It is a basal-type reader which describes the early life of wild wolves in simplistic, noninvolved, and nonpersonalized language. The children immediately began talking about "Nativity" before I even had a chance to sit down at our table. They had their photocopies of the chapter in front of them, and to my amazement, some of the children had even written in the margins and underlined specific sections. I suggested that we hold off on our discussion of "Nativity" until after we had read the companion book, *Baby Wolf*. They were impatient to discuss "Nativity," but finally agreed to wait when I described how the reading strategy synthesis would enable them to talk in greater depth about why they liked "Nativity" so well.

I read *Baby Wolf* with great interpretative expression in my voice, just as I do with my own young children. The Stevenson readers were polite and even laughed at some of the un-named "baby" wolf's antics. But at its close, no one asked to see the small paperback book. However, as I pulled Paulsen's glossy, hardcover *Puppies, Dogs, and Blue Northers* out of my briefcase, nine readers hurled themselves across the table, shouting, "I want to see it first, I want to see what Cookie looks like, I want to see what the straw den that Paulsen made looks like."

As the book passed around the table I began our discussion by asking the children to brainstorm a list of similarities between the two books. Their responses were predictable: The books were both about dogs; they were both about puppies; they were both about dogs who were pretty wild; they were both about feeding and raising puppies. I was pleased with their responses, yet it seemed to me that we had scratched only the surface of literal comprehension.

I then asked the children to describe the differences between the two texts. They collectively replied: "Cookie and the puppies are owned by a man, but the wolves are not; Paulsen built a den for Cookie and the wolves built their own den; none of the wolf puppies die, and one of Cookie's babies dies." They articulated a thorough list of the differences between the two texts, but again, I wanted them to dig deeper.

"Which book is better?" I asked.

"Nativity!" they chorused.

"Why?" I asked. "Write it down right now in your Reader's Notebooks."
The children scrambled for pens, notebooks, and space to spread out. A few moments later, they began to read their responses:

- " 'Nativity' gives us so much information, you feel like you know Cookie, but *Baby Wolf* doesn't tell really what the puppies are like—only sort of, you know, generally."
- " 'Nativity' tells us all about the relationship between Gary and Cookie. We see them mad at each other, we see Cookie want to kill Gary, we see how much she also loves Gary. But in *Baby Wolf*, we don't know how they feel about one another."
- " 'Nativity' gives us so much information—we know that they have to mix beef blood in the water to make sure the dogs drink it. It's gross, but it gives you such a good picture in your mind."
- " 'Nativity' is real to me. *Baby Wolf* is just a story."[46]

I was astounded and touched by the children's heartfelt responses to Paulsen's "Nativity," but I returned to the scoring guide for the strategy of synthesis to assess where exactly their insights, comments, and questions fell on the continuum. Without a doubt, they all would have scored a "5" that day on synthesis. They were "articulating how parts of a text work together to build meaning; describing the relationship between text and context; integrating texts by discussing similarities and differences; extending meaning beyond the text's literal boundaries by comparing modes, genres, issues and ideas between texts; and ultimately, they were critically reviewing their reaction to the comparison or contrast of multiple sources in order to produce an 'extended abstract.' "[47]

Integrating for Synthesis: Suggested Assessment Tools

In terms of recommending assessment models particularly aimed at assessing a reader's ability to synthesize texts, the oral interview in which teachers and students conference together concerning a review of books read by the student would be effective in facilitating an opportunity for students to comment "across the texts" on issues they found compelling, interesting, or even confusing. Further, the short answer and the ***extended response*** assessment models serve as excellent opportunities for readers to demonstrate their level of competency in synthesizing texts. We recommend using one of the Traits of an Effective Reader Scoring Guides to assess short answer and extended responses. Here is the integrating for synthesis rubric from the Reading a Literary Text Scoring Guide:

5 The advanced response integrates textual material and other types of knowledge, and uses decision-making skills to create a synthesis of ideas from a literary text.

A score of five reflects that the response(s) directly, specifically, and concretely performs the synthesis application directed by the question. The response(s) uses synthesis language appropriately to reflect an indepth understanding of the skills of integrating for synthesis. The example(s) cited is well chosen and has a strong parallel development if the question demands it. The response(s) builds beyond the question, integrating several layers and types of knowledge into one harmonious whole.

3 The developing response integrates textual material with aspects of other types of knowledge to create a surface level synthesis that has potential for development.

A score of three reflects that the response(s) generally performs the synthesis application directed by the question. The response(s) uses synthesis language with some accuracy to reflect a basic understanding of the skills of integrating for synthesis. The example(s) cited is usually general and "safe." Parallel development, if demanded, is not always visible. The response can be somewhat disjointed, with the layers and types of knowledge not always well integrated.

1 The emerging response employs some skills of synthesizing literary texts, but a fully developed integration is still emerging.

A score of one reflects that the response(s) does not usually perform the synthesis application directed by the question. The response(s) do not use synthesis language with much accuracy; in fact, use of terminology often does not reflect the skills of integrating for synthesis. General references to an example or examples are made, and there is no visible understanding of parallel development. The response(s) does not usually integrate sources, texts, and understandings to a measurable degree.

Critiquing for Evaluation: Theory

Readers evaluate texts at the highest level of critical thinking. Evaluation of a given text is based on a reader's understanding of the text's conventions, on the compilation of comprehension strategies invoked to make meaning of the text, on searching out the contexts within the text and then interpreting them thoughtfully and with purpose, and on a synthesis of the text's given place in interrelationship with other texts. With this wealth of knowledge in hand, readers evaluate a text to determine its quality and effectiveness within its genre and subject.

The following skills are invoked during the process of evaluation: readers experiment with ideas, think divergently, take risks, express opinions, speculate, explore alternative scenarios, raise questions, make predictions, and think metaphorically. Through thoughtful evaluation readers challenge the text by agreeing or disagreeing, arguing, endorsing, questioning, and/or wondering about a text's implications. At this level of reading, readers are actively engaged with the text and have committed themselves on some level—emotional, academic, social, cultural—to making the text "their own" through the process of evaluation. By making a text "their own," readers have developed a relationship with a text based on the impetus of the analytical traits of reading.

During evaluation, readers judge the effectiveness of literary and informational devices, and they contrast the accuracy of information from a written text with other sources of information and personal knowledge. Readers evaluate by testing the validity of the author's ideas, information, and/or logic by comparison with those of other authors, their own knowledge, and cultural understanding. Through introspective evaluation, readers identify an author's biases, cultural and philosophical references, and underlying purpose.

Kathy Short, a reading and writing teacher, comments that, in evaluating texts, "what we create with inquiry isn't answers all of the time, but it is understanding which may change as we continue the inquiry. We inquire not to narrow down, fix an answer: we inquire to open up, unearth new questions, even increase confusion."[48] Through this "confusion" students develop curiosity. Edward Hoostein says "curiosity is a condition of aroused uncertainty that exists when there is a gap between a given and desired state of knowledge...[readers'] subsequent behavior following curiosity is generally exploration, a search for information in order to reduce uncertainty and eliminate discrepancy."[49]

The process of evaluation is exploration, and the end result is an evaluation that is thoughtful, grounded, accurate, researched, and tested. Raymond Wlodkowski calls the reader who participates in the process of evaluation "a good reader. He/She is graced with a perspective that makes the difficult desirable. Learning is often extremely difficult and risky, but the reader is continuously growing towards increased self-direction and effectiveness."[50] The ability to evaluate texts is the decision to assert one's voice in the textual relationship. Paul Friere, a philosopher, says that "the literacy process, as a cultural act of freedom, is an act of knowing in which the learner assumes the role of knowing subject in dialogue with the author. It is a process through which people who had been previously submerged in reality begin to emerge in order to reassert themselves with critical awareness. [By evaluating] they gain the right of self-expression and world-expression, of creating and recreating, of deciding and choosing and ultimately participating in society's historical processes."[51]

Critiquing for Evaluation: Practice

In the Stevenson pilot, we used Australian author Mem Fox's book *Feathers and Fools* to assess for the strategy of evaluation. Several of the readers were familiar with the text, already having chosen it during our session on context. But, for our final activity together, I read the book aloud. The picture book, breathtakingly illustrated, presents a parable on war using peacocks and swans as adversaries. The two types of birds slaughter one another in a senseless war over their differences, and then the two chicks who emerge unscathed from their egg shells at the end of the story celebrate their similarities. It is a deceptively simple book. Every time I have had a child practice his or her reading traits using this book, I am amazed to hear at least one comment on an unusual aspect I had not yet considered.

Following our discussion of *Feathers and Fools*, I wanted to combine assessing the strategy of evaluation with an end-of-our-time-together verbal and oral picture of how their ideas about reading had changed over the six weeks. Their comments were as follows:

- Andrew: "A good reader is someone who pays attention to the book and also thinks back to what he or she read. A good reader stretches himself and enjoys learning and reading. I really learned a lot . . . . I understand more words now."[52]

- Blair: "A good reader is mostly reading and talking to you about books. You taught me how to understand the books we read and how to predict a book."[53]

- Amanda: "I think a good reader is someone who doesn't pay attention to what other people are doing, someone who doesn't flip through the pages, reads the whole book, tries to sound out words, and tells what happened."[54]

- Ashlee: "A good reader is one who you can listen to. If maybe they have to stop at periods, and run right through commas and all the punctuation, then they need to practice more. And they do pay attention to the book. The reader has to try to understand the book and really listen. I learned bigger words, and you helped me understand them, too. You helped me want to write stories also."[55]

- Bobby: "A good reader, I think, equals up to these circumstances: 1) understands what his or her book is about; 2) is very focused on what he or she is reading; 3) wants to read the book; 4) is able to interpret the book correctly. Plus, a good reader loves to read long books."[56]

- Mychal: "A good reader is a person paying attention only to the book. It is a person spending a lot of time with a book, too. I learned how to predict in a nice, fun way from Mrs. Thompson. And I learned how to understand books a lot better. It was fun while it lasted."[57]

- Alan: "I learned a lot from you, Mrs. Thompson, like how to predict a story and what goes on in a reader's head when they are reading."[58]

- Destaney: "You taught us the meaning of evaluation and how to predict the story. Now I can read big words. I had a fun time."[59]

- Collin: "I learned I can read out loud faster than I used to. And I learned I can write more than I used to. So I learned a lot. Also, I learned to predict."[60]

These written entries, personally very rewarding for me, also demonstrate how the Stevenson students have changed their thinking about reading. The strategies they now use to recognize, comprehend, intuit, interpret, synthesize, and evaluate texts are different than before the implementation of the pilot testing. We accomplished this growth in their thinking by using group work, peer partners, whole-class discussion, and/or individual conference with teachers in order to prepare for the final assessment of evaluation. These evaluative experiences enable readers to gather information, to critically weigh ideas and opinions, and to become "experts" on a text, a given subject, or even a specific author.

Critiquing for Evaluation: Suggested Assessment Tools

Three specific assessment methods to use, then, in conjunction with the scoring guide for the assessment of evaluation are ***Dear Author Letters***, ***Dear Reader Letters***, and a ***Dialogue Journal***. In the first example, ***Dear Author Letters***, readers are asked to write a letter to an author addressing issues of evaluative awareness. They are encouraged to take the experience of their reading strategies and compose a written response expressly for the author of the text. In this written response, readers are encouraged to experiment with ideas, think divergently, take risks, express opinions, speculate, explore alternative scenarios, raise questions, and take a critical stance. In the ***Dear Reader Letters***, readers are asked to respond in writing to questions raised by student peers or teacher-facilitators. In this exercise, the student-reader-responder takes on the role of the author. In the first assessment method, the reader responds from outside the text looking in; in the second method, the reader responds from inside the text looking out. Both assessment methods provide an opportunity to establish a critical stance from which to form evaluative judgments and opinions. The third and final assessment method, and one that allows for fluid exchange between the insider and outsider perspectives, is the ***Dialogue Journal***. In this exercise, students and teachers or students and students interact through the mediation of a journal. ***Dialogue Journals*** can take many forms, but the most popular is the use of individual student journals in which students record observations and evaluations of the texts they are reading, and teachers respond in short, written commentary as a way to spur the student to deeper levels of thought. A second way to use ***Dialogue Journals*** is to allow a book group within a reading workshop to share a journal in which they write comments and "dialogue" with another in a written format about a common text they are reading and discussing. All three assessment models provide rich opportunities for students to display their evaluative strengths and abilities as readers and engagers of texts. For all of these assessment tools as well as the short answer and extended response tools, you can use the critiquing for evaluation rubric to assess the quality of the student response:

5 The advanced response evaluates to assert a strong voice in the textual relationship.

A score of five reflects that the response(s) thoroughly and thoughtfully answers the evaluation question. Evaluation terminology is used effectively, precisely, and thoroughly to indicate the reader's critique of the literary text. The example(s) chosen is well-developed, placed in context, and connected well to other ideas. The response(s) moves beyond the parameters of the question and critically engages the world of text and ideas in a solid, defensible judgement.

3 The developing response hesitates to evaluate thoroughly; it still plays it somewhat "safe."

A score of three reflects that the response(s) adequately answers the evaluation question. Evaluation terminology is sometimes used, but the terms chosen do not always match the critical thinking displayed in the response. The example(s) cited from the text is somewhat obvious and safe, and connected to other ideas in fairly limited ways. The response(s) generally stays within the question and does not venture into the larger world of critical discourse.

1 The emerging response is just beginning to explore a critical stance to a literary text.

A score of one reflects that the response(s) does not adequately answer the evaluation question. Evaluation terminology is used sporadically if at all, and rarely indicates the reader's critique of the literary text. The example(s) chosen is incomplete or sketchily described, and not connected to other ideas or issues. The response(s) is incomplete and, at times, just restates the question words.

Conclusion

With the Traits of an Effective Reader now defined in both theory and practice, effective reading assessment and instruction can take place within a framework of clear criteria, scoring guides for literary and informational texts, and a continuum of performance skills within each of the six trait areas. In addition to the traits of good reading, the literature review also has suggested ways to make classrooms more open to fostering critical reading skills.

In researcher Brian Cambourne's words, there are seven conditions to critical reading development: (1) the immersion of readers in texts of all kinds; (2) multiple, ongoing demonstrations of construction and use of texts; (3) the expectation that readers will succeed; (4) allowing readers to make their own decisions and take responsibility; (5) time and opportunity to use reading in realistic, authentic ways; (6) allowance for approximation, understanding the essential natures of "mistakes" in promoting learning; and (7) response—from knowledgeable peers and teachers.[61]

Once again, the connection between assessment and instruction is apparent. Without learning the criteria of good reading, our readers will sometimes produce good readings, but those times will be haphazard and prone to chance. However, with target goals firmly in place—the performances described by the Traits of an Effective Reader assessment model—reading will become purposeful, thoughtful, engaging, and thorough. Our readers will also be thinkers. The International Reading Association noted in 1988 that "reading assessment must reflect recent advances in the understanding of the reading process . . . instructional decisions are too often made from assessments that define reading as a sequence of discrete skills that students must master to become readers. Such assessments foster inappropriate instruction."[62]

We, on the other hand, hope to produce readers as described in Alberto Manguel's *New York Times* 1997 bestseller, *A History of Reading*:

> We read to find the end, for the story's sake. We read not to reach it, for the sake of the reading itself. We read searchingly, like trackers, oblivious of our surroundings. We read distractedly, skipping pages. We read in gusts of sudden pleasure, without knowing what brought the pleasure along . . . . We read generously, making excuses for the text, filling gaps,

> mending faults. And sometimes, when the stars are kind, we read with an intake of breath, with a shudder, as if a memory had suddenly been rescued from a place deep within us—the recognition of something we never knew was there, or of something which we vaguely felt as a flicker or a shadow, whose ghostly form rises and passes back into us before we can see what it is.[63]

Finally, as Manguel reminds us, reading is a lifelong learning experience, and there are moments, fleeting and transitory, when it is a transforming experience, as well.

The Stevenson pilot offered us a tremendous opportunity to observe readers, to learn from readers, and to learn about the validity and the impact of reading assessment methods. We rediscovered the important truth that, to assess readers authentically, we must recognize that each reader responds to a text in a slightly different way. To assess readers' abilities and placement on the developmental continua of the Traits of an Effective Reader, we must be willing to use a variety of assessment tools to create a whole "picture" of a reader. As a result of this pilot testing, researchers at the Northwest Educational Laboratory believe we can help teachers become better assessors of their students' reading ability by proposing alternative assessment methods that delve deeply into individual student ability.

Through the use of the variety of assessment tools discussed throughout Chapter One, we also recognize a reader's need for some choice among assessment options to fully display his or her understanding of texts. This is the power of voice and choice in alternative reading assessment. By valuing and celebrating our students as individual readers, we empower them to use reading as a tool for discovery, for exploration, for confirmation, and for affirmation. As Linda Rief asks in her introduction to her collection of essays, *All That Matters,* "We do not leave our passions outside the door when we come into our classrooms; why do we expect our students to do just that?"[64] As researchers seeking to discover ways to increase student achievement in reading, we must allow our students to bring their passions into the classroom, into their writing, into their reading, and into their discussions. Thus validated and strengthened, they will seek reading and learning as lifelong activities.

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Chapter Two

The K-3 Classroom: Giving Them Roots and Wings

> Reading for pleasure is an extraordinary activity. The black squiggles on the white page are as still as the grave, colorless as the moonlit desert; but they give the skilled reader a pleasure as acute as the touch of a loved body, as rousing, colorful, and transfiguring as anything out there in the real world. And yet, the more stirring a book the quieter a reader; pleasure reading breeds a concentration so effortless that the absorbed reader of fiction—transported by the book to some other place and shielded by it from distractions—who is so often reviled as an escapist and denounced as the victim of a vice as pernicious as tippling in the morning, should instead be the envy of every student and every teacher.[1]

Primary Readers *Do R*ead Critically

To love the act of reading, to read voraciously, to turn to a book before television, radio, even other people in a desire to acquire information, to read to transport oneself to another world—this is the kind of reading that promotes learning as a lifelong activity. For the primary teacher—teachers of kindergarten through second (and sometimes early third) grade—the stakes are high; the seeds for a love of reading are most often planted during these years.

I walked past my first-grade son's room the other night, and through his shut door, I heard his voice: "This is amazing, absolutely amazing." Opening the door, I found him, light on, knees up, pillows stacked behind, looking every bit like his mother, another voracious reader. "What are you doing up at ten o'clock?" I asked sternly.

"Oh, hi, Mom," he said, his eyes blazing. "Listen to this: 'There are sharks so tiny they can fit in your hand, and sharks so large they are bigger than a school bus.' Isn't that amazing?" As I sat on the edge of his bed and listened to him read for another half hour, I found myself thinking, "Here is a learner who makes no distinction between life and work. Learning takes place all the time, and every situation provides a different opportunity to learn. But reading, yes, reading appears to be the medium for learning that crosses all boundaries and overcomes all hurdles."

For every child, identifying oneself as a reader is key to success as a student. No other content area has as much impact on a student's self-esteem as the content area of reading. If a child is designated a "poor reader," or given an even more debilitating identity—a "reluctant" reader—then he or she can be a reluctant, or even frustrated, student. Reading is involved in every aspect of a student's life. From the moment kindergartners or first-graders walk into their first classroom, they must find their seats by *reading* their names; they must sign up for lunch choices by *reading* the daily menu; they must learn rules and responsibilities by *reading* the job chart. Reading does not just take place in the 40 to 50 minutes assigned to the content area time; reading seeps into every aspect of a student's life.

In order to support our primary students' evolving critical reading development, we need to provide them with *roots* and *wings*. By giving our students roots—assessing their emerging reading ability, encouraging their decoding and phonics skills, and making the developmental continuum part of our daily language as we talk about reading—we help students develop a strong foundation of critical reading skills. By also providing our students with wings—assessing their critical responses to texts, exposing them to a wide variety of real literature about real things, and allowing them to experiment with more sophisticated texts through a variety of opportunities—we help them see that critical reading ability is larger than just decoding letters and symbols. To be a critical reader is to be in communication with the world around us and to see ourselves as a members of a community through accessing text—the language we read, speak, hear, and write.

The classroom piece that we have developed to aid primary teachers in the assessment and instruction of emerging critical reading skills is the "K-3 Developmental Continuum." The Developmental Continuum is designed to supplement the reading program you have in place in your classroom. Just as you have some ways of assessing student ability in fluency, rate, and accuracy in oral reading, our Developmental Continuum is designed to assist you in collecting data that indicates students' growth in the area of critical reading. By adding the Developmental Continuum to your toolbox of assessment strategies, you are more able to "triangulate data"—that is, to gather a variety of student reading samples (standardized test scores, running records, miscue studies, retellings, qualitative and quantitative assessments) and create a picture of the reader's ability by examining these several layers of evidence. In this chapter we will show you two student quantitative work samples. We will examine each student's work and assess it using the Developmental Continuum to help us chart each student's ability in each of the six traits of an effective reader. We can then use this information to make good decisions about instructional strategies and lessons. We can also show students their strengths and challenge areas using the Developmental Continuum as a guide for self-assessment. Nothing is more exciting than seeing your work described in positive, affirming terms! Finally, the Developmental Continuum can be used building-wide; it can be a common language and continuous assessment system that moves with students through the early grades.

In the Developmental Continuum we have defined and described five developmental levels for each of the six traits of an effective reader: emerging, beginning, developing, expanding, and bridging readers. Our early readers can be assessed on individual traits and on all of the traits together. Our descriptions for kindergarten through third grade readers' developmental stages address both *process* and *product* issues. In reading theory we recognize that students develop process strategies—predicting, confirming, monitoring, and word-attack strategies. These skills and behavioral components differ from product skills in that, when student readers produce a product in response to a reading experience, they "capture" their critical reactions to texts through either an oral or a written response. The Developmental Continuum describes and defines both the behavior processes for each trait and the quality of the products for each trait.

Just a note of explanation: In our research, primary students (K-2) demonstrate critical reading ability from early encounters with text, but they also need a great deal of support through assessment. So we encourage teachers, parents, and administrators to use the Developmental Continuum as well as the Reading a Literary Text Scoring Guide in third grade (particularly in the first half of the year). By using two assessment systems keyed to the same traits and the same language, third-graders will be both encouraged by the "scoreless" Continuum and challenged by the benchmarks-focused Scoring Guide. As we assess our two student samples, you can find both the complete "K-3 Developmental Continuum" and the "Reading a Literary Text Scoring Guide" in the Appendix. Please have them handy as each student sample is assessed. (Note: The Reading an Informational Text Scoring Guide is also available in the Appendix and will be addressed in Chapter 3.)

As we stated in the preface to *The Journey of a Reader*, our focus in this book is on the "reading-to-learn" component of reading theory and pedagogy. The student assessment pieces we will look at together in this chapter are the result of students encountering a single text in three situations. First, students read the text—Arnold Lobel's fable, "The Camel Dances"—by themselves. They decoded the words; they decoded the text structure; they identified characters, plot, and conflict; they formed an initial interpretation of the fable. Second, the students read the fable in partners and acted out the story line. Third, the teacher read the fable to the whole class and conducted a content lesson on the characteristics of a fable.

An immediate question I am asked when I describe this assessment model is: "Are we truly assessing student reading ability if we allow them to read with partners and even have the teacher read the fable aloud?" Good question. The answer is that, indeed, there are going to be times in the assessment of student reading ability when we want to assess only their reading (grade) level. Several standardized tests assess this aspect of reading skill alone; the Gates-MacGinite Test is one example. However, in choosing to assess critical reading ability, we are assessing more than just decoding skills; we are assessing the students' ability to understand genre, to comprehend events and relationships, to understand the context, the author's purpose, to problem-solve and interpret the events of the fable, to compare the camel's experience with their own experiences, and finally to judge the camel's decisions and to evaluate her spirit of determination. To assess student ability on these many layers, we must realize that the decoding skill is only one layer. To access all of the layers, students need to have as much access to the text as possible. Think of this analogy: in our writing classrooms, we wouldn't dream of telling students that they must not attempt to write a story until they can write a perfectly punctuated and grammatically correct sentence. No way! We understand that learning to write with clarity and expression is a messy job that involves starts, stops, brainstorming, revision, and editing. Why should reading be any different? Our readers, too, have a messy job before them. They will learn to read in many ways and on many levels. Their skills are developing in different forms, as well. We hold our students' growth back if we tell them to hold off on those interpretations and evaluations until they can decode perfectly. So, yes, giving students access to texts that may be "technically" beyond their decoding ability does present a few issues we need to address. But educators are a resilient and creative bunch. For an example, you need only to look at Canadian teacher Lois Burdette, who teaches Shakespeare to second- and third-graders.[2] Ms. Burdette has discovered ways for students to savor the richness of Shakespeare's language and culture through various means of accessing texts. Relax. Yes, assess individual reading levels, but also assess critical reading ability by using thought-provoking and wonderful literature to get kids engaged and empowered. Their responses to powerful literary and informational texts matter. They really do.

Student Work Samples: Jacob, Third Grade

Our first student work sample is a quantitative assessment package completed by Jacob, a third-grader from Everett, Washington. Remember, a quantitative assessment tool is designed to evaluate student breadth of knowledge in a particular trait area. On each of these sample tools, you will notice that both Jacob and Erin are asked to demonstrate more than one skill of a particular trait. So, when we begin the Teacher Assessment phase, we will be looking at the samples for a breadth of demonstrated skill in their responses.

Before we administered the assessment, we asked Jacob and all the other students to complete a Reading Interest Survey (RIS) to give us a picture of who they were as readers. (A blank Reading Interest Survey form is included in the Appendix.) Jacob's RIS looked like this:

Reading Interest Survey:

Name: Jacob Grade: 3 Teacher: Mrs. B.

How many minutes a day do you read: 30-40 minutes

Do you read for enjoyment too or just for homework? Mostly just for homework, but sometimes for fun.

Do your parents and other relatives read a lot? Sometimes. They read the newspaper.

Do adults at home read out loud to you? Not anymore. They did when I was a little kid.

What are your favorite kinds of books? Sports books and animal books. I like Predator and Prey books.

Do you read things other than books? Newspapers, magazines, the Internet? Sometimes I read stuff on the internet, but it's hard.

What are some of your favorite activities? Soccer. Nintendo. Riding my bike.

Do you ever read about those activities? Can you give an example? Not really. I don't know where books are like that.

What is your favorite subject at school? Reading and PE.

Do you like reading in that subject? I like the stories we read in class, and I like it when Mrs. B. reads to us.

What is one goal you have for yourself as a reader in this class? I want to read more and more chapter books.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

What is your plan to meet your reading goal? To try reading them even if they are hard.

As your teacher, how can I help you meet your reading goal? Show me more books that I can read and help me with words I do not know.

We can tell a lot about Jacob as a reader from his Reading Interest Survey form. We know that he reads 30 to 40 minutes a day primarily for homework reasons; his parents appear to be informational text readers in that they read the newspaper; Jacob's parents also seem to place a value on a language-rich environment, in that they read to him as a young child. Jacob's reading interests seem to fit primarily in the informational text realm as well, although it does seem that when called upon to handle more sophisticated textual material—the Internet—Jacob's self-monitoring skills falter a bit. Jacob also seems to be in the emerging category of selecting books for his particular interests; he says, "I don't know where to find books like that." Jacob has a strong and well-defined goal for his reading identity in desiring to move into reading more chapter books. This readiness indicates a lessening of reliance upon picture books to aid his comprehension. Jacob says he loves it when his teacher, Mrs. B, reads aloud to the students. This indicates that Jacob's ability to perform critical reading skills—decoding conventions, establishing comprehension, realizing context, developing interpretations, integrating for synthesis, and critiquing for evaluation—may be above his actual word- and symbol-decoding level. Jacob is a reader who fits the profile for the combined use of the Developmental Continuum and the Traits of an Effective Reader Scoring Guide. Let's now look at some of his sample assessments for each of the traits of an effective reader.

Our Sample Text:

The Camel Dances

The Camel had her heart set on becoming a ballet dancer.

"To make every movement a thing of grace and beauty," said the Camel. "That is my one and only desire."

Again and again she practiced her pirouettes, her releves, and her arabesques. She repeated the five basic positions a hundred times each day. She worked for long months under the hot desert sun. Her feet were blistered, and her body ached with fatigue, but not once did she think of stopping.

At last the Camel said, "Now I am a dancer." She announced a recital and danced before an invited group of camel friends and critics. When her dance was over, she made a deep bow.

There was no applause.

"I must tell you frankly," said a member of the audience, "as a critic and a spokesman for this group, that you are lumpy and humpy. You are baggy and bumpy. You are, like the rest of us, simply a camel. You are not and never will be a ballet dancer!"

Chuckling and laughing, the audience moved away across the sand.

"How very wrong they are!" said the Camel. "I have worked hard. There can be no doubt that I am a splendid dancer. I will dance and dance just for myself."

That is what she did. It gave her many years of pleasure.

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Satisfaction comes to those who please themselves.[3]

Decoding Conventions

In the decoding conventions assessment, we conducted an oral interview. A teacher sat next to Jacob during his oral reading of "The Camel Dances." His reading was fairly smooth, with some trouble on the more difficult vocabulary words. Jacob did draw on his knowledge from an earlier lesson; the tough vocabulary words—pirouettes, releves, and arabesques—had been covered in an earlier vocabulary lesson and even in a student demonstration of the ballet moves! The teacher asked Jacob a series of questions dealing with the trait of decoding conventions.

Teacher Question: "Can you tell me what kind of a story this is?"

Jacob's Answer: "It is a fiction story that is a fable too."

Teacher Question: "Good. Do you remember when we talked about fairy tales and fables? Can you tell me why this is a fable?"

Jacob's Answer: "It is a fable because it has an animal and a moral."

Teacher Question: "Good. Let's look at the fable together. Can you show me where the title is?"

Jacob's Answer: "The title 'The Camel Dances' is at the top of the story."

Teacher Assessment: Jacob did a good job in his oral interview. We can find his level of decoding conventions skill on the K-3 Developmental Continuum under the heading of a "developing reader." His responses and actions demonstrate each of the indicators of the developing category. He "read aloud with fluency on familiar stories; he identified chapter titles; he identified genre with ease, and he is reading aloud with some expression in his voice." If we look to the Traits of an Effective Reader Scoring Guide, we can look at Jacob's responses and find them on the scoring guide as well. His responses fit within the parameters of a "3" in that "the responses answer the question generally and use some basic text structure language appropriately." Also, Jacob's responses seemed "fairly safe and...within the confines of the questions." Jacob's score is not higher because his answer "It is a fable because it has an animal and a moral" does not yet demonstrate a thorough connection between the idea of text structure and theme. He has the characteristics of a fable down, but he is still learning to see how "The Camel Dances" functions as an example of a fable. Let's look at his next assessment sample.

Establishing Comprehension

For the trait of establishing comprehension, Jacob answered a series of short questions in a paper-and-pencil assessment. Both questions and answers are listed below:

Question: What happens in the beginning of the story?

Jacob's Answer: In the beginning, she had her heart on becoming a ballet dancer.

Question: What happens in the middle of the story?

Jacob's Answer: She decided that she was ready and made a recital.

Question: What happens at the end of the story?

Jacob's Answer: She dances for herself and gives herself many years of pleasure.

Question: Who is the main character of the story?

Jacob's Answer: It is a camel that is a hard worker and intelligent.

Question: Choose three words from the story that describe the main character.

Jacob's Answer: Determined, hard worker, intelligent

Question: Write one or two sentences that you believe describe the story's main idea.

Jacob's Answer: It is about a camel that wants to become a ballet dancer but everybody says she won't become a ballet dancer but she learns a lesson.

Question: Choose the best words from your thinking to finish this sentence:
"The Camel Dances" is a special kind of story that teaches us a lesson. The lesson of this story is: ________________.

Jacob's Answer: satisfaction.

Teacher Assessment: Jacob's short answer assessment demonstrates a strong and organized comprehension of "The Camel Dances." We can find his skill level described in the "expanding reader" category of the K-3 Developmental Continuum. His sample indicates that he is able to "summarize a literary purpose" and also to "summarize whole stories in addition to the parts." His answer to the three questions about beginning, middle, and end are wonderful; they move beyond literal comprehension and indicate an understanding of how each event relates to the overall theme. His description of the camel's character indicates that he is able to identify and name characteristics of character, which is a strong comprehension skill moving into inferential understanding. On the second instrument, the Traits of an Effective Reader Scoring Guide, Jacob would score a "4." If we look at the descriptors for both the "5" and the "3," we see that Jacob's responses fit somewhere between the two. His responses "confidently and directly answer the specific questions," but his examples are still generally alluded to rather than specific and concrete. Further, he demonstrates a "willingness to respond 'beyond' the question." If we were to share this assessment score with Jacob and make recommendations, we would show him how close he came to scoring a "5," lacking only specific reference to actual events in the fable. With such advice, Jacob could return to his assessment, revise his thinking, and improve his response. This is an excellent opportunity for a student to grow in two ways: one, he becomes a better reader through returning to his initial comprehension and improving it, and two, he becomes aware of ways to improve his reading responses, thus indicating his growth as a reader. Let's look at his next sample.

Realizing Context

To assess students' level of "realizing context," it is important to assess their ability to "infer" information from their reading. The skill of inference can be described to student readers as "in-the-head knowledge" plus "on-the-page knowledge." In this assessment sample, Jacob answered some paper-and-pencil questions and performed some simple tasks of choice and response.

Question: Underline the best word that describes the camel. Then, in the space below the words, please write why you chose that word to describe the camel.

Strong Independent Smart

Jacob's Answer: Because she kept trying and no one told her what to do.

Question: Underline the best word that describes the camel's friends. In the space below the words, please write why you chose that word to describe the camel's friends.

Mean Hurtful Uncaring

Jacob's Answer: They were mean because they said bad things about her like calling her lumpy, bumpy, humpy and even ugly.

Question: Underline a sentence that describes what the story "The Camel Dances" teaches us readers. In the space below the sentences, please write why you chose that sentence.

a) The camel learned that dancing for herself was more important than dancing for her friends.
b) The camel's perseverance taught her to believe in herself.
c) The camel discovered that being independent was more important than being liked by her friends.

Jacob's Answer: I chose "C" because independence is what she needs most when she grows up.

Teacher Assessment: Jacob's answers and task application demonstrate a moderate understanding of the skills of realizing context. In the first two questions, Jacob demonstrates that he understands the vocabulary terms "independent" and "mean." His ability to connect the terminology with the events from the fable seems a bit hesitant with the term "independent," where he answers in general terms and does not provide any evidence for support, but his connection of the term "mean" and his description of the moment when the camel's friends insult her is specific and makes use of quotes from the fable. His ability to perform a task in the third question demonstrates a bit of uncertainty where he had to choose one "theme" and then defend his choice. His statement of explanation is somewhat vague and not connected to the fable in any visible way. By using the K-3 Developmental Continuum, Jacob's skill level is reflected in the "beginning reader" category as "he recognizes high frequency words [e.g., 'mean']"; and he is making "initial attempts at inferring meaning." On the Traits of an Effective Reader Scoring Guide, Jacob would score a "2," as he is halfway between the "3" and the "1" descriptors. His answers "generally answer the questions"(3), but they do not use context terminology to show basic understanding of context. Further, he does cite one event from the fable ("they were mean, they said bad things about her like even calling her humpy, bumpy, lumpy and even ugly"), but his responses at this time do not "provide enough evidence to decide if the reader understood the contextual layers of the literary text"(1). Let's look at his next sample.

Developing Interpretations

To assess for the trait of developing interpretation, we asked Jacob to fill out a reading journal entry in response to a question. Then, Jacob and a teacher "dialogued" about Jacob's response in an oral interview. We have included here the initial question and the transcript of further questions and oral responses.

Question: “What is the problem that happens in the fable, ‘The Camel Dances’?”

Jacob’s Answer: Nobody wanted to watch her dance because she was a camel.

Question: “So, when the camel learned to dance, did she overcome a problem?”

Jacob’s Answer: “Yes, because she pleased herself by doing it alone.”

Question: “So, if the camel learned not to care about what other people think, did you learn something too?”

Jacob’s Answer: “Yes, the lesson I learned is satisfaction and to never give up.”

Teacher Assessment: Jacob’s ability to develop interpretations around the text “The Camel Dances” is right in the middle of the range in both the K-3 Developmental Continuum and the Traits of an Effective Reader Scoring Guide. As a “developing reader” on the continuum, Jacob is able to “accurately identify a major conflict in a story,” when he says “nobody wanted to watch her dance because she was a camel.” He also demonstrates the “ability to connect facts to conflicts and resolutions” by resolving the problem question with his answer “yes, because she pleased herself by doing it alone.” Jacob receives a “3” on the scoring guide for developing interpretations by creating a series of responses that “generally answer the question using some language that reflects initial interpretation understanding”; further, his “connections between the evidence and the analysis are not always evident” in his fairly general answers. And, of course, his final answer, “Yes, the lesson I learned is to never give up,” is moving toward the idea of incorporating an understanding of the bigger picture, but that particular analysis is still in development.

Integrating for Synthesis

To assess for Jacob’s ability to integrate for synthesis, we designed a paper-and-pencil assessment that asked him to put the events of a story in order and compare one of the story’s events to his own background experience. Both of these skills, “putting information in order" and "integrating personal experience with the events of a text," demonstrate a reader's ability to synthesize information.

Question: Read each of the sentences carefully. Put a number "1" in front of the sentence that describes the first event in "The Camel Dances" story. Then put a "2" for the next event. Put a number in front of each sentence until you have placed each one in the order that matches the story.

4 The camel 's friends laughed at her ballet dancing.

1 The camel had her heart set on becoming a ballet dancer.

5 The camel decided to dance anyway. It made her happy.

2 The camel practiced ballet for long months under the sun.

3 The camel announced a recital and invited her friends.

Question: Please explain why you chose your numbers.

Jacob's Answer: I did my numbers how I remembered the story. It was about how the camel learned to believe in herself.

Question: Have your friends ever laughed at you, and how did it make you feel?

Jacob's Answer: Once I was playing soccer. I was goalie. The other team scored and my team said, "You're a bad goalie." That made me sad.

Teacher Assessment: Jacob's responses in sequencing, analysis, and comparison to background experience demonstrate a developing skill level for integrating for synthesis. On the K-3 Developmental Continuum, his work is reflected in the "developing reader" category. He is able to "put stories in chronological order," as he correctly ordered the five events from the fable, and he "understands the concepts of cause and effect with guidance," as he describes a cause-and-effect situation from his own personal background. On the scoring guide, Jacob would receive a "3," as his responses "integrate textual material with aspects of other knowledge to create a surface level synthesis that has potential for development." His answer, "I did my numbers how I remembered the story," reflects an understanding of events occurring in a sequential order, but the deeper understanding of events having a causal relationship is still in process. Although his comparison of his experience as a soccer player reflects some similarities to the camel's experience, his response still seems "somewhat disjointed, with the layers and types of knowledge not yet well-integrated." For example, if we asked Jacob to revise his answer to include a more obvious connection between his experience and that of the camel, the response would be stronger.

Critiquing for Evaluation

To assess Jacob's level of evaluative thinking through his reading, we asked him to write an "extended response" to a single question.

Teacher Question: Explain why the camel continued to dance even after her friends told her she looked silly.

Jacob's Answer: After her hard work she needed to please herself so she danced. Wouldn't you after all that hard work? The camel continued to dance because she believed in herself and she did not really care if her friends were laughing at her. I bet she felt pretty bad but she worked real hard. The other camels laughed at her because they think that camels cannot do dancing but she did not mind because she knew that she can be whatever she would like to be.

Teacher Assessment: Jacob's response is impassioned and thoughtful. On the K-3 Developmental Continuum, Jacob's response fits within the "beginning reader" category of the critiquing for evaluation trait. His response "explains why a character behaves in a certain way," and he also affirms his understanding of the camel's choice to continue to dance, stating that "she did not mind because she knew that she can be whatever she would like to be." On the Traits of an Effective Reader Scoring Guide, Jacob would score a "2" on the trait of critiquing for evaluation. His response falls between the "3" and the "1" indicators. His "response does adequately answer the question"(3), but "the examples chosen are incomplete"(1). His response demonstrates an understanding of the theme and the motivation behind the camel's choice to continue dancing, but he does not cite examples or specific evidence in his response. Jacob's response provides a great "rough draft" of his thinking that he could revise and deepen using his critical reading skills.

Overall Teacher Assessment: We now have a pretty thorough picture of Jacob's critical reading skills. If we show his scores and placements across the range of the traits, they look like this:

	Conventions	*Comprehension*	*Context*	*Interpretation*	*Synthesis*	*Evaluation*
K-3	**Developing**	**Expanding**	**Beginning**	**Developing**	**Developing**	**Beginning**
Scoring Guide	3	4	2	3	3	2

We see that Jacob is a strong comprehending reader, with adequate skills in decoding conventions, developing interpretations, and integrating for synthesis. His two lowest skill areas, realizing context and critiquing evaluation, may also reflect two critical reading skill areas that may not be instructional focus areas in class. With this range of information in place, we can now make instructional choices and decisions for Jacob to enable him to meet that reading goal of "reading more and more chapter books, even if they are hard." If we used these scores to predict probable success level on state assessment tests, we see that Jacob needs intervention and instruction on the trait and skill areas of context and evaluation. Direct attention to these two areas, in addition to the wonderful reading instruction and assessment work he is already receiving class-wide, will make his development of those skills all the more likely. By using the K-3 Developmental Continuum and the Traits of an Effective Reader Scoring Guide together, Jacob can see not only a description of the development of critical reading skills, but also a description of a successful response. The two assessment tools taken together provide a "road map" for Jacob's journey as a reader. Armed with these tools as well as with phonics instruction, grade-level appropriate literature, and other reading assessment tasks and tools, Jacob is well on his way to developing breadth and depth in his critical reading skills.

Student Work Samples: Erin, Third Grade

Let's look at one more student sample. Erin, a classmate of Jacob's, is also in third grade in Everett, Washington. First, let's look at Erin's Reading Interest Survey.

Reading Interest Survey

Name: Erin Grade: 3 Teacher: Mrs. B.

How many minutes a day do you read: 1 hour. (I really do)

Do you read for enjoyment too or just for homework? I read all the time, for homework and for fun.

Do your parents and other relatives read a lot? Yes, we all go to the bookstore together and buy books.

Do adults at home read out loud to you? Yes, but mostly I read to them. They like that.

What are your favorite kinds of books? Babysitter Club, American Girl, Little House Books.

Do you read things other than books? Newspapers, magazines, the internet? I read lots of other things.

What are some of your favorite activities? Playing barbies, babysitting my cousins, helping my mom cook

Do you ever read about those activities? Can you give an example? I read about babysitting all of the time.

What is your favorite subject at school? Reading!

Do you like reading in that subject? Of course, I read when I finish my math, I read all the time.

What is one goal you have for yourself as a reader in this class? I want to read much harder books.

What is your plan to meet your reading goal? To read really big novels.

As your teacher, how can I help you meet your reading goal? At the library show me books you think are good

We can tell quite a bit from Erin's Reading Interest Survey. She appears to identify herself boldly as a "reader" in that she reads for an hour every day. Her reading is not confined to homework; she seeks information from texts frequently. Her parents seem to be firmly committed readers as well, not only going to the bookstore with Erin but continuing to make reading a family activity, even after Erin seems to be a fairly independent reader. Erin's reading choices show a wide variety of genre and level of difficulty—"Babysitters' Club" (easy-to-read female protagonist books); "American Girl" (historical fiction); and "Little House Books" (autobiographical books of pioneer life by Laura Ingalls Wilder). Although Erin does not specify what "much harder books" are, we can assume she means further development in the genres she likes now and exploring even more of the diverse young adult fiction available. With Erin we will also use both the K-3 Developmental Continuum and the Traits of an Effective Reader Scoring Guide for assessment purposes. Erin also read Arnold Lobel's "The Camel Dances." Let's look at this enthusiastic reader's samples.

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Decoding Conventions

In the decoding conventions assessment, we conducted an oral interview. A teacher sat next to Erin during her oral reading of "The Camel Dances." Her reading was very smooth, with great fluency and expression in her voice. The teacher then asked Erin a series of questions dealing with the trait of decoding conventions.

Teacher Question: "Can you tell me what kind of a story this is?"

Erin's Answer: "This is a short fiction story about a camel who wanted to dance."

Teacher Question: "Good. Do you remember when we talked about fairy tales and fables? Can you tell me why this is a fable?"

Erin's Answer: "This is a fable because camels don't dance. There is also a moral to the story."

Teacher Question: "Good. Let's look at the fable together. Can you show me where the title is?"

Erin's Answer: "'The camel dances' is at the top of the page and is the first thing you see."

Teacher Assessment: Erin's answers are thoughtful and forthright. Erin is an "expanding reader" on the K-3 Developmental Continuum. She is able to "identify genres and subgenres independently" by saying, "This is a short fiction story." Further, she "reads aloud with fluency and self-expression," and she is "able to identify text organizers and explain their use" by saying, "'The Camel Dances' is at the top of the page and is the first thing you see." On the Traits of an Effective Reader Scoring Guide, Erin would score a "4" on the trait of decoding conventions. Her responses fall between the "5" and the "3" in that "the responses answer the question and use some text structure language appropriately" by stating "this is a short fiction story." Her response stretches beyond the question when she alludes to the definition of a fable as an animal accomplishing a human task, but she falls short of the "5" score by not stating it specifically. Her decoding conventions skills are strong, and use of the continuum and the scoring guide would sharpen both her skills and her ability to demonstrate them through the quality of her responses.

Establishing Comprehension

For the trait of establishing comprehension, Erin answered a series of short questions in a paper-and-pencil assessment. Both questions and answers are listed below:

Question: What happens in the beginning of the story?

Erin's Answer: In the beginning, the camel tried her best to become a ballet dancer.

Question: What happens in the middle of the story?

Erin's Answer: In the middle of the story the camel announces a recital.

Question: What happens in the end of the story?

Erin's Answer: At the end, when the recital was over, the other camels laughed at her and said she couldn't dance.

Question: Who is the main character of the story?

Erin's Answer: The camel is a hard "tryer" and believes in herself. She never gave up and tried her best.

Question: Choose three words from the story that describe the main character.

Erin's Answer: Dancer, believer, determined

Question: Write one or two sentences that you believe describe the story's main idea.

Erin's Answer: I think the main idea is that even though somebody puts you down, keep going.

Question: Choose the best words from your thinking to finish this sentence: 'The Camel Dances' is a special kind of story that teaches us a lesson. The lesson of this story is: ________________________.

Erin's Answer: be determined.

Teacher Assessment: Erin's ability to establish comprehension through her reading and understanding of a literary text is strong in some areas and in need of clarification in other places. This is a difficult sample to assess because, although Erin does demonstrate a complex understanding of theme—"I think the main idea is that even though somebody puts you down, keep going"—her depiction of what happens in the beginning, middle, and end of the text relies solely on the literal events leading up to the conflict—"at the end, the camels laughed at her and told her she couldn't dance"—and does not deal with the manner in which the camel resolves the story and continues to dance in spite of opposition. Erin would likely fall into the category of "developing reader" on the developmental continuum and merit a "3" on the scoring guide. Her responses do not confirm the level of sophisticated comprehension her understanding of theme indicates, so this exercise would serve as a wonderful student/teacher conference sample where Erin would be asked to clarify and defend her responses.

Realizing Context

To assess students' level of "realizing context," it is important to assess their ability to "infer" information from their reading. The skill of inference can be described to student readers as "in-the-head knowledge" plus "on-the-page knowledge." In this assessment sample, Erin answered some paper-and-pencil questions and performed some simple tasks of choice and response.

Question: Underline the best word that describes the camel. Then, in the space below the words, please write why you chose that word to describe the camel.

Strong Independent Smart

Erin's Answer: The camel is independent because she didn't care what other camels said.

Question: Underline the best word that describes the camel's friends. In the space below the words, please write why you chose that word to describe the camel's friends.

Mean Hurtful Uncaring

Erin's Answer: The camel's friends are hurtful because they said "You are humpy, bumpy and lumpy like us."

Question: Underline the best sentence that describes what the story, "The Camel Dances," teaches us readers. In the space below the sentences, please write why you chose that sentence to describe the story's message.

a) The camel learned that dancing for herself was more important than dancing for her friends.
b) The camel's perseverance taught her to believe in herself.
c) The camel discovered that being independent was more important than being liked by her friends.

Erin's Answer: I chose "C" because being independent is more important than being liked. It's believing in yourself. Her many years of pleasure came by her dancing for herself and never giving up.

Teacher Assessment: Erin is a strong contextual reader. She is able to "read between the lines" and infer messages about abstract ideas such as character, independence, and self-discipline. On the developmental continuum, Erin is an "expanding reader" in that she is "gaining deeper meaning by reading between the lines" when she says "her many years of pleasure came from dancing for herself and never giving up." Further, she uses contextual vocabulary with guidance in her use of "independent" and "hurtful." On the scoring guide, Erin would score a "4" for the depth of her responses. Erin's responses "generally answer the questions" (3), and her use of examples and quotes in two answers demonstrates "well-chosen examples to illustrate understanding of contextual issues" (5). This is a wonderful sample to show balance in Erin's reading abilities between strengths and challenge areas.

Developing Interpretations

To assess for the trait of developing interpretation, we asked Erin to fill out a dialogue journal entry in which she responded to a question in her reading journal. Then, Erin and a teacher "dialogued" about Erin's response in an oral interview. We have included here the initial question and the transcript of further questions and oral responses.

Teacher Question: "What is the problem that happens in the story, 'The Camel Dances' ?"

Erin's Answer: "The problem is that the other camels said she was lumpy and bumpy. They were mean to her, and she had to decide if being a camel or being independent was more important."

Teacher Question: "So, when the camel learned to dance, did she overcome a problem?"

Erin's Answer: "I think that learning to dance was part of the problem, because it wasn't like a camel to dance. She had to decide to keep dancing because she loved it or to listen to her friends. Either way, she's probably a little sad, but at least she is independent now. That's the moral, you know."

Teacher Question: "Do you think that becoming independent always means that you will be a little sad about something?"

Erin's Answer: "Well, I don't know. Maybe. Maybe yes, I think. Because you have to do what you think is right, and others, you know like those other mean camels, might think it is wrong. I learned even if somebody laughs, Keep going. It doesn't matter, because in your heart you know you are right."

Teacher Assessment: Erin's articulate nature, as well as her passion for "causes," is visible in this delightful oral interview concerning her dialogue journal. Erin is a "bridging reader" on the developmental continuum for the trait of developing interpretations. Her oral interview demonstrates "indepth responses" and "recognizes the resolution of a problem in a story through analysis" and "seeing a bigger picture." On the scoring guide, Erin would score a "5," as her responses "directly answer the questions using on-target information." She uses examples that are both literal and inferential when she says, "I think that learning to dance was part of the problem because it was not like a camel [to know how to dance]." Further, the "response moves beyond the questions and engages the bigger picture" when she says, "you have to do what you think is right even if others think it is wrong." Erin's ability to articulate her interpretations in an oral interview might provide a wonderful modeling opportunity for her peers. If she and her teacher conducted a "think aloud" interview, Erin's use of specific examples as well as her ability to connect her analysis to a bigger picture would provide wonderful discussion material for an entire class.

Integrating for Synthesis

To assess for Erin's ability to integrate for synthesis, we designed a paper-and-pencil assessment that asked her to put the events of a story in order and compare one of the story's events to her own background experience. Both of these skills, "putting information in order" and "integrating personal experience with the events of a text," demonstrate a reader's ability to synthesize information.

Read each of the sentences carefully. Put a number "1" in front of the sentence that describes the first event in "The Camel Dances" story. Then put a "2" for the next event. Put a number in front of each sentence until you have remembered each one in the right order.

4 The camel 's friends laughed at her ballet dancing.

1 The camel had her heart set on becoming a ballet dancer.

5 The camel decided to dance anyway. It made her happy.

2 The camel practiced ballet for long months under the sun.

3 The camel announced a recital and invited her friends.

Question: Please explain why you chose your numbers.

Erin's Answer: I chose my numbers because it is exactly how it happened. But the numbers did not say how much her feelings were hurt. I think that is important too. And how determined she was. And independent.

Question: Please write your answer to this question:
Have your friends ever laughed at you, and how did it make you feel?

Erin's Answer: Yes, in first grade they'd say that I'm fat and ugly. I felt just like the camel when they told her she was humpy, lumpy, and bumpy. In first grade the kids could not see in my heart just like the mean camels don't see in her heart either.

Teacher Assessment: Erin does a marvelous job synthesizing not only the events in the story but her personal connection to it, as well. On the developmental continuum, Erin is in the "bridging reader" category. She is able to "read for information and solve problems" and also "add depth to responses by connecting the reading with other experiences." She is also able to "integrate multiple perspectives to form a thoughtful response." When she explains her choice of numbers, she rightly addresses some of the inferential elements that are not covered in the literal depiction of the events. Her ability to synthesize not only the events themselves but also the abstract themes they represent demonstrates an advanced ability to synthesize information. For the scoring guide, Erin would score a "5" for the trait of integrating for synthesis. Her response "directly performs the synthesis application," and the "examples chosen have a strong parallel development" when she compares her experience to the camel's, saying, "I felt just like the camel when they told her she was humpy, lumpy, and bumpy. In first grade the kids could not see in my heart just like the mean camels don't see in her heart either."

Critiquing for Evaluation

To assess Erin's level of evaluative thinking through her reading, we asked her to write an "extended response" to a single question.

Teacher Question: Explain why the camel continued to dance even after her friends told her she looked silly.

Erin's Answer: She believed in herself and didn't give up because it made her happy. She wanted to be a professional dancer. Her friends didn't care about her dancing, all they cared about was theirselves. After they hurt her feelings, she kept on dancing without them watching her dancing. The moral of the story is she didn't care about what her friends thought and she believed in herself. All she cared about was will I be a professional dancer?

Teacher Assessment: Erin's response is enthusiastic and impulsive. On the developmental continuum, Erin is in the "developing reader" category. She "explains why a story happens in a certain way based on reason combined with story element," and she demonstrates risk-taking in evaluative criticism by "questioning why a story or a character acts in a certain way." On the scoring guide, Erin would receive a "3" in critiquing for evaluation in that her response "adequately answers the question," but she still stays somewhat safe. Further, without the use of quotes or specific examples, Erin's response remains somewhat general. With all of Erin's enthusiasm, this extended response sample provides a wonderful opportunity to show Erin where thoughtful, pointed, specific critiques demonstrate a reader's evaluation skills in ways that can be even more powerful and convincing than a simple, energetic response. Thus, sophistication in her critical reading skills will rise as she learns to evaluate thoughtfully with insight and evidence to match her enthusiasm.

Overall Teacher Assessment: We now have a pretty thorough picture of Erin's critical reading skills. If we show her scores and placements across the range of the traits they look like this:

	Conventions	*Comprehension*	*Context*	*Interpretation*	*Synthesis*	*Evaluation*
K-3	**Expanding**	**Developing**	**Expanding**	**Bridging**	**Bridging**	**Developing**
Scoring Guide	4	3	4	5	5	3

If we look at Erin's skills overall, we see that she is a strong reader in almost all of the traits. Even her scores of "3" in comprehension and evaluation still fall within the proficient category; however, in these two areas her skills were somewhat blurred due to her rushing to answer questions without fully developing an organizational frame that would highlight her strengths. She is definitely ready for the Traits of an Effective

Reader Scoring Guide to be used on all of her work. The developmental continuum describes the skills and strategies readers use as they develop the "read-to-learn" component of critical reading, but the scoring guide focuses attention on the quality of the response. Erin is definitely ready to shape, strengthen, and develop her responses using quotes, citations, and direct examples. Erin is a gifted reader whose strengths and challenge areas are accessible and easily pinpointed.

Lesson Plans for Each of the Traits of an Effective Reader

Next in this chapter, we've created six assessment opportunities—one for each trait—for you to use in your primary classroom. We've described how each "task" or "tool" fits within the ongoing or cumulative category, the qualitative or quantitative category, and, of course, we've described how to offer your students plenty of voice and choice.

DECODING CONVENTIONS: Reader's Theater

Assessment type: *task*
Type of task: *ongoing, qualitative*
Voice: *high; individual and group participation*
Choice: *moderate; selection of "roles"*
Skill focus: *oral fluency, text structure*
Selected text: *Piggie Pie!* **by Margie Palatini**
Suggested age group: primary
Time required: 30-40 minutes for "practice" and 15-20 minutes to perform (invite another class!)

Description:

This is an activity for a bunch of hams! Reader's Theater is an activity to encourage students to develop oral fluency and expression through their reading. The format of Reader's Theater also teaches decoding organizational conventions skills by the assignment of "roles." In Margie Palatini's marvelous book *Piggie Pie!*, a witch has a hankering for piggie pie. But when she goes to "Old MacDonald's Farm" to hunt up some piggies, the pigs disguise themselves as various other farm animals and even as the farmer himself in an attempt to outsmart the witch. The book lends itself so NICELY to read-aloud theater—with lines such as, "Fork over the pork, you walking milk machine, or I'll curdle your cream!"—that the roles of the narrator, the witch, a chorus, the chickens, the cows, the ducks, the farmer, and a wolf, could easily encompass a whole class. The vocabulary is a bit sophisticated and the humor is also quite dry, but readers young and old love this activity.

Materials/Preparation:

1) Get a copy of the book
2) "Rewrite" the text, assigning passages of the book to the following characters: a narrator, "Gritch" the Witch, a cow, a chicken, a duck, a farmer, a wolf, and—oh so important—a chorus.
3) Copy your new text onto cards or in a script form.

What to Do:

1) Get the kids on their feet. Reading while sitting down encourages muffled voices!
2) Assign "roles."
3) Read the new *Piggie Pie!* out loud.

4) Pause and direct attention to the various moments when conventions leap off the page. Look for exclamation marks, question marks, sing-song moments, thoughtful moments, dialogue moments—the moments are endless!
5) If students are having trouble speaking up, have them face each other and then take three giant steps backward. The effort to make oneself heard often encourages fluency and expression.
6) Discuss the various "feelings" displayed in the book. How does "feeling" color or flavor the expression in our read-aloud voice? How does sad sound? Mad? Frustrated? Conniving?

Desired Outcome:

- Students develop the power of fluency in conveying a message
- Students understand that texts are made up of small parts and a bigger whole
- Students learn the components of a "play": dialogue, director's notes, scene, and so forth
- Students see that Reader's Theater is fun and an important mode for storytelling

86

ESTABLISHING COMPREHENSION: Say Anything!

Assessment type: ***task***
Type of task: ***ongoing, quantitative***
Voice: ***High; Partner Participation***
Choice: ***low; students must respond, but comments are individualized***
Skill focus: ***use of reading strategies, prediction, self-monitoring, comprehension***
Selected text: ***Smoky Night*** **by Eve Bunting**
Suggested age group: primary (perhaps more appropriate for Grade 3)
Time required: 15-20 minutes to read book and 15-20 minutes to review responses

Description:

"Say Anything" is a read-aloud activity for a teacher who loves to read aloud. This book, *Smoky Night*, won the 1995 Caldecott Medal amidst much turmoil and concern, as it focuses on the perspective of a young boy who loses his cat in a night of interracial rioting. The activity is designed to motivate students to actively pursue comprehension in purposeful ways that help to frame and organize their reading responses to make critical thinking connections. The teacher/facilitator goes through pre-reading, reading, and post-reading strategies with the students to model good reading preparation. He/she begins by asking for predictions based on the text's cover art, title, author's name, context clues, prior knowledge, or background clues. The students are then asked to watch for "turning moments" and details that "stick out in their minds." Finally, they are told that the teacher/facilitator will pay attention to those things, as well, and at various moments in the book, he/she will stop and say, "Say anything!" At that moment, each student is to turn to his/her neighbor and WHISPER something—anything—a prediction, a comment, a sorting of details, an acknowledgment of a turning moment. Of course, the whispering is key or else you easily have a jungle on your hands!

Materials/Preparation:

1) A copy of the book
2) A list of pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading strategies on chart-pack paper so students can self-monitor their comprehension. Include questions such as: Am I looking at pictures for clues? Am I predicting what will happen next? Can I find the main character? Minor characters?
3) A chart-pack list of some of their predictions

What to Do:

1) Gather the students together in a whole-group format. Desks are fine; a circle on the floor is even better.
2) Read ***Smoky Night*** out loud, pausing during important turning moments to say to your students, "Say anything." Allow them to whisper quietly to each other.
3) Follow up oral reading with questions.
4) Check their predictions. Write their results on chart-pack paper. Whose predictions came true?
5) Check your list of reading strategies. Discuss what they look like, giving examples, asking for models from their own experience.

Desired Outcomes:

- Students learn to recognize, use, and understand reading comprehension strategies
- Students learn to predict with accuracy using text clues
- Students learn to distinguish between major and minor characters, and supporting and significant details, and to recognize important turning moments
- Students develop purposeful comprehension skills

REALIZING CONTEXT: The Dialogue Journal

Assessment type: *tool*
Type of tool: *ongoing or cumulative, quantitative or qualitative*
Voice: *high; partner participation*
Choice: *low; students must respond, but comments are individualized*
Skill focus: *inference skills; contextual knowledge and vocabulary; author's tone*
Selected text: *Aria* by Peter Elbing (works well with a variety of open-ended texts)
Suggested age group: primary (perhaps more appropriate for Grade 3)
Time required: 15-20 minutes to read book and 15-20 minutes for students to respond

Description:

In constructing a dialogue journal, students choose partners. One student or the facilitator reads a book out loud. He/she then writes three to five questions focused on the trait of realizing context on the overhead or chalk board. Partners then select one question. Each student writes an answer to the question and then they "switch" responses. Each then is able to "dialogue" with the other student through agreeing, disagreeing, or bringing out other contextual information through writing responses to their partner's comments. For the book chosen above, readers are often asked, "Did Aria become a bird at the end of the book?" Readers have to pull on all types of knowledge to answer the question that really has no "correct" answer. As children respond to the question, they learn from one another's ideas.

Materials/Preparation:

1) Put a list of realizing context questions on the overhead or blackboard. Some examples are: What are some vocabulary words that seem to belong to this story? What does the author's voice sound like? When does this story take place? How do you know? Where does this story take place? What are some clues that tell you? What are the families like? The villages? The country?
2) Discuss the word "context." What does it mean? Explain the idea of using pictures for clues—one example of students realizing context.
3) Explain the idea of "reading between the lines." Use students up front as an illustration. Select three students and whisper cues in each ear—"look sad" or "look happy" or "look mad." Have the rest of the class "infer" what emotion each child is feeling. Connect this "reading between the lines" to the type of inferences we make when we read critically.

What to Do:

1) Divide the class into partners. Prepare them with paper and pencil.
2) Select a book to read out loud. Choose a student reader, or read it yourself.
3) Read the book out loud.
4) Point to the questions on the board and ask for quiet time.
5) Have students respond individually, using an egg timer if necessary. Encourage the use of quotes, specific examples, clear language, etc.
6) Have students exchange responses, read them, and respond to their partner's ideas.
7) Share as a whole group afterwards. What happens if your understanding of context was different from your partner's? How did you resolve it?

Desired Outcomes:

- Students develop inferential skills and understand the concept of "reading between the lines"
- Students learn to recognize contextual vocabulary and use it as a window to "see" context
- Students learn to develop contextual responses and to respond to ideas different from their own

DEVELOPING INTERPRETATIONS: Solving a Mystery

Assessment type: *task*
Type of task: *ongoing, qualitative*
Voice: *high; whole group participation*
Choice: *low; students are encouraged to offer clues and evidence*
Skill focus: *making interpretations by using evidence; resolving texts*
Selected text: Any large picture color-copied and enlarged from a picture book; Arnold Lobel's *Fables* is an excellent choice.
Suggested age group: primary
Time required: 20 minutes for students to respond and "rip" cover sheet revealing clues.

Description:

This assessment task is delightful for primary students! We're teaching the trait of developing interpretations by starting out with pictures and moving to text. A picture from a picture book is color-copied and enlarged. Cover it with a piece of butcher block paper. One by one ask each student to rip a little piece of the top paper off to reveal a snippet of the picture underneath. But here's the important part: With each "rip," ask the participating student to state what "clues" he or she discovers as you all move toward "solving the mystery of the hidden picture." You can make this a more complex activity by also asking, "What problems do you see here?" Ask each "ripper" to interpret and guess what the picture might be. Using a text such as Arnold Lobel's *Fables* is a wonderful choice, especially if you use the picture from the fable "The Camel Dances." The picture is of a camel wearing a tutu and dancing in the hot sun!

Materials/Preparation:

1) Photocopy the picture. Before class, place it at student level on a board of some sort. Cover it up with a piece of butcher block paper.
2) Have the four-step process of developing interpretations on chart-pack paper. The four steps are: (1) identify a problem, (2) look for clues and evidence, (3) make an interpretation using your clues, and (4) connect it to a bigger picture.
3) Discuss the four-step process.
4) Prepare the students for the activity.

What to Do:

1) Gather your students in a tight circle with the covered picture in clear view of everyone.
2) One by one, have students "rip" off a small piece of paper.
3) Have them record their clues and their interpretations (guesses as to the picture's subject) on a two-column piece of chart-pack paper in plain view.
4) After the picture has been uncovered, ask students when they began gathering clues that helped them "solve the mystery."

Desired Outcomes:

- Students develop abilities to recognize visual clues that will lead to textual clues
- Students develop ability to "key" on to important clues, selecting and processing
- Students develop ability to see connections between clues and interpretations
- Students see successful interpretations

INTEGRATING FOR SYNTHESIS: ***Sequencing a Story***

Assessment type: *task*
Type of task: *ongoing, qualitative*
Voice: *high; small group participation*
Choice: *low; students are encouraged to offer reasons for sequencing*
Skill focus: *synthesizing through sequencing, context clues, and background clues; understanding and applying theories of cause and effect*
Selected text: Any picture book works well as long as a clear plot is evident from the pictures; color-copy and laminate the pictures, making three "sets"
Suggested age group: primary
Time required: 20 minutes for students to sequence their pictures and write their cause-and-effect descriptions

Description:

In this activity designed to demonstrate that even our earliest readers have the ability to synthesize material and understand cause-and-effect philosophy, readers organize laminated pictures taken from a book. They have to "put the story in order" by negotiating with a small group and talking about context and picture clues to make their choices. They focus on the idea of "cause and effect" and demonstrate their ability to synthesize by defending their "sequencing" choices.

Materials/Preparation:

1) Select a picture book with a clear progression of plot based on cause and effect.
2) Color-copy the pictures and laminate them, making three sets.
3) Prepare students for the activity by describing familiar cause-and-effect relationships. Students might act out parent/child relationships where children receive a reward or a punishment as the "effect" of a cause, or they could see a scientific demonstration of the "explosion" effect caused by the mixing of vinegar and baking soda.

What to Do:

1) Divide students into three equal groups. Give each group a set of pictures.
2) Put each group in a separate corner of the room.
3) Have each group sequence the story, using their cause-and-effect knowledge.
4) Have group members write down the sequence of the story.

5) Have three presentations in which groups describe and defend their sequencing, explaining their cause-and-effect decisions.

Desired Outcomes:

- Students learn the skills of cause-and-effect thinking, sequencing, background knowledge, and content knowledge, all as ways of integrating for synthesis
- Students understand that different perspectives may create different sequences; however, the defense of the reasons why is most important
- Students use a multiplicity of critical reading skills to develop a synthesis of a story, a text, or a series of pictures

CRITIQUING FOR EVALUATION: Dear Mr. Blueberry Letters

Assessment type: *tool*
Type of tool: *cumulative, qualitative*
Voice: *high; individual participation*
Choice: *low; students are encouraged to offer reasons for Emily's beliefs*
Skill focus: *evaluating through selection of detail*
Selected text: *Dear Mr. Blueberry* by Simon James
Suggested age group: primary
Time required: 10 minutes for read-aloud time; 10 minutes for questions; 20 minutes for student written response time.

Description:

In this charming picture book, Emily, a young writer, discovers a blue whale living in her backyard pond. She writes a letter to Mr. Blueberry, her teacher, who then writes back and informs her that it is impossible for blue whales to live in backyard ponds. Emily and Mr. Blueberry spend the rest of the book exchanging letters, as Mr. Blueberry weaves in knowledge about whales and Emily staunchly defends her knowledge that she does, indeed, have a whale in her backyard. For this type of assessment activity, students hear the story read out loud and then write "Dear Mr. Blueberry Letters" themselves, in which they evaluate and defend why Emily should be allowed to believe that she has a whale in her yard.

Materials and Preparation:

1) Get ahold of a copy of *Dear Mr. Blueberry* by Simon James.
2) Discuss the terms "evaluation" and "defending your point of view."
3) Provide concrete samples so students can understand and apply both terms to their own reading experience.

What to Do:

1) Read the book out loud.
2) Create a graphic organizer on which you place Mr. Blueberry's list of facts and Emily's list of "defenses."
3) Model a sample "Dear Mr. Blueberry Letter," creating your own criteria.

4) Sample criteria you might include: Choose one example of Mr. Blueberry's reasons why there could be no whale and one example of Emily defending her own experience.
5) Initiate quiet writing time where students select their issues and write their letters.
6) Have students share letters with table partners.
7) Conference with each student, looking for evaluation skills in their letters.
8) Use the "Student-Friendly Reading a Literary Text Scoring Guide" to have students self-assess their samples.
9) Have students revise their evaluations and "clarify" their reading.
10) Prepare letters for portfolios.

Desired Outcomes:

- Students develop and demonstrate strong evaluative reading skills
- Students learn to develop a reading response by including specific criteria
- Students develop inferential skill support for "defending their perspectives"

Suggested Titles for Read Aloud and Read Alone:

Bunting, Eve. David Diaz, Illustrator. *Smoky Night.* 1995. Orlando: Harcourt Brace. ISBN: 0-15-269954-6

Elbing, Peter. Sophy Williams, Illustrator. *Aria.* 1993. New York: Penguin Books. ISBN: 0-670-85062-4

James, Simon. *Dear Mr. Blueberry.* 1991. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company. ISBN: 0-689-50529-9

Lobel, Arnold. *Fables.* 1989. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.
ISBN: 0-06-023973-5

Palatini, Margie. *Piggie Pie!* 1996 New York: Houghton Mifflin.

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[1] Eugene H. Cramer and Marrietta Castle, eds. *Fostering the Love of Reading: The Affective Domain in Reading Education.* Newark, Delaware: IRA Publications, 1994, p. 41.

[2] Burdette, Lois. *A Child's Portrait of Shakespeare.* Ontario Canada, Black Moss Press, 1995.

[3] Lobel, Arnold. *Fables.* NY: Harper Collins, 1989, p. 22. Used with permission

Chapter Three

The Grade 3-5 Classroom: Moving Beyond Narrative Texts

Sharing and interacting with others in literature study circles or book talks is a natural outgrowth of real literature in the classroom. Although the use and teaching of literature is profoundly important to literacy learning, children usually find informational texts the most difficult to comprehend. Informational texts can present readers with a number of challenges that are unique to expository style, such as unfamiliar text structure or a high degree of background or content knowledge. Nonetheless, the results of the 1988 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) revealed that many students in the United States are unable to perform higher-level reading functions from specialized reading materials.[1]

The Intermediate Reader and Informational Texts

There are crisis moments in a reader's life. When a child recognizes his or her name in print—"Hey, those symbols mean *me*"—is the first. When a child recognizes a thing or a place and associates it with the name on it—"That word says 'Safeway'; did you know the sign is the same as the store?"—is the second. And my family demonstrated a growing awareness of the power of reading when one of my children solemnly informed me, "Mom, did you know that words are everywhere? They jump out at me all the time." Symbols become words, words are attached to meaningful places, people and things, and language becomes inscribed on our world. But what happens when the form we have come to know and recognize as "our story"—the narrative text—is joined by a different type of text? A type that sounds, to our ears, less personal—a text that is full of information, facts, statistics, and difficult, content-specific vocabulary? Another crisis moment in the reader's life has occurred, namely, the introduction to the informational text.

The informational text presents so much difficulty to student readers because of its many layers and multiple types of information. Think about it. The narrative text—our old friend—has a single form and formula we can count on: (1) introduction of setting; (2) introduction of characters; (3) introduction of problem; (4) series of events to explain problem and develop characters; (5) high point of drama, the "climax;" (6) resolution of problem; (7) establishment of theme. But the informational text has no set pattern or formula, and a multiplicity of forms: cause and effect, compare and contrast, concept and definition, description, goal, action, outcome, problem and solution, proposition and support, and sequential. These forms may appear alone, or in combination with others. Each has its own specific formula. What are our readers to do? Where do they start?

To assess how well students interact with informational texts, the same traits of an effective reader apply. Readers of informational texts still decode conventions, establish comprehension, realize context, develop interpretations, integrate for synthesis, and critique for evaluation. However, what is different is the form and formula of the texts they read. So, at the NWREL, we decided to develop two versions of our Traits of an Effective Reader Scoring Guide: one for literary texts and one for informational texts. We will be using the Reading an Informational Text Scoring Guide in this chapter for assessing student sample reading responses from a fifth-grade class in Gladstone, Oregon. The Reading an Informational Text Scoring Guide can be found in the Appendix.

Informational Texts: Organizational Features

There are two aspects of informational texts that seem to provide our intermediate (Grade 3-5) readers some problems: text organizational features and content-focused vocabulary. Text organizational features comprise all the ways that information is organized on the page. Think about the pages of a newspaper. On the first page, we find a lead article, several other "big" stories, the weather report, and a quick, one-sentence summary of other articles to be found in the paper. More daunting is the paper's overall organization: We have the "A" section of the world's, nation's, and region's most important and current news stories; we have the "metro" section of city and county-related news; we have the "living" section of home, garden, and literary arts, not to mention sports, business, and the classified ads. Without an understanding of the way newspapers are generally organized, specific information can be hard to find. What if you asked your students to locate the times a theater is showing a particular film? They would have to be familiar with the organization of a newspaper to find that information.

In informational texts such as textbooks, we have units, chapters, sub-chapters, sidebars, margin notes, and more. What a load of information! For our intermediate readers, we can ease this particular crisis moment in their lives by explaining text organization features. We can assist them in developing their critical reading abilities in regard to reading informational texts by showing them ways to manage the many features of the informational text. In short, we can teach students how to read textbooks and other informational texts. Of course, content is primary, but without an understanding of the form in which content is presented, our readers can become hopelessly lost. Let's not only explain where we're going in our subject matter; let's also give a students a "map," of sorts, to help them on their journey.

In the assessment samples we will examine in just a moment, please note how many of the questions ask students to demonstrate their level of knowledge concerning text organization features. Assessment can drive instruction, through the valuable information provided by assessment results. If students demonstrate low ability to process and understand text organization features, an instructional lesson, ready-made, models the elements that a successful response might have included.

Informational Texts: Content-Specific Vocabulary

How do we assess student level of knowledge in content-specific vocabulary? One traditional method that seems to work is (1) discover an unknown vocabulary word; (2) look it up in the dictionary; (3) write down the definition in your own words; and (4) use it in a sentence to demonstrate your "ownership" of the word. Works well, right? Yes, certainly, this method for learning vocabulary words works well when dealing with terminology from a narrative text. However, narrative vocabulary is distinctly different from informational text vocabulary. Let's take a look at two sample passages.

***#1 Narrative text from Arnold Lobel's "The Camel"*:**
"'How very wrong they are!' said the Camel. 'I have worked hard. There can be no doubt that I am a splendid dancer. I will dance and dance just for myself.'"[2]

#2 Informational text from Stephen Kramer's Lightning*:*

"During a lightning flash, electrons shoot through the air so fast that they make the air around them glow. A streak of lightning shows the path the electrons followed as they blasted their way forward."[3]

Let's choose a word from each passage: "splendid" from the first and "electrons" from the second. If we follow our traditional method of learning vocabulary words, most students would be able to write a proficient sentence that would demonstrate their gained knowledge of the vocabulary word "splendid." But is their understanding of the term solely from the dictionary definition? No. I think we all agree that narrative vocabulary acquisition happens in three ways. One, the reader sifts through his or her experience for any background knowledge of or associations with the word. Second, the reader pulls on the context of the reading passage itself. Do we understand the "gist" of the term "splendid" based on the subject of the story? Most likely. Third, what about the concept of a fable? Often, the theme of narrative texts reveals a layer of understanding about vocabulary that informational texts do not reveal.

Let's look at our other selected word, "electrons." Is a dictionary definition going to suffice for demonstrated understanding of the term? Probably not. Why? In informational text vocabulary, three things are usually true. One, the meaning of a single word is often best described in relationship to the larger context of its subject matter—in our example, lightning. Dictionary definitions rarely place the word in a helpful context. What would happen if the dictionary definition for "electron" read: "a stable subatomic particle in the lepton family having a resting mass of 9.1066 gram and a unit negative electronic charge of 1.602 coulomb."[4] Guess what? It does. What would happen if a fourth-grader came across that particular definition? My hunch is that the word "electron" would not become a part of her vocabulary based on that definition! Second, in informational text, the meaning of an entire passage may rest on the meaning of a single term or cluster of closely related terms. Third, new vocabulary in informational texts rarely pulls on the prior knowledge of the reader. Hence, new subject or content area equals new vocabulary. To put all of this into a nutshell, narrative vocabulary can be taught as isolated words because the context of the story helps to fill in the gaps. But informational text vocabulary must be taught conceptually for students to develop "ownership" of the new terms. To understand electrons, students must learn about lightning; to understand what chlorophyll is, students must understand the concept of photosynthesis; to understand the term anaerobic, students must understand the concept of oxygen depletion on muscles.

Now let's turn to two student samples. We're going to look at Al's and Aspen's ***qualitative*** assessment packages dealing with an informational essay entitled "A Whale of a Tale." Remember, a ***qualitative*** assessment tool is one designed to evaluate student depth of knowledge in a particular trait area. On each of these sample tools, you will notice that both Al and Aspen are asked to demonstrate just one skill of a particular trait. So, when we begin the Teacher Assessment phase, we will be looking at the samples for a depth of demonstrated skill in their responses. These qualitative assessment tools are different from the quantitative assessment tools we saw in Chapter 2. Throughout *The Journey of a Reader*, we have attempted to demonstrate a wide variety of assessment tasks and tools that assess both breadth and depth of student ability level. We'll return to the quantitative model in Chapter 5.

The essay, "A Whale of a Tale," can be found in the Appendix. In these two samples, we continue our focus in this book on the "reading-to-learn" component of reading theory and pedagogy. The assessment tool we designed for the essay, "A Whale of a Tale," comprises six **extended response** questions, each of which reflects a single skill designated within one of the six Traits of an Effective Reader. In both student samples, we'll follow the model established in Chapter 2: the assessment questions, the student responses, and the teacher assessment of the responses using the Reading an Informational Text Scoring Guide. The process we used to capture the critical reading skills of these students involved their reading the essay silently to themselves and then writing their answers silently.

Student Work Samples: Al, Fifth Grade

Before we administered the assessment, we asked Al and all the other students to complete a Reading Interest Survey to give us a picture of who they were as readers. (A blank Reading Interest Survey Form is included in the Appendix.) Al's RIS looked like this:

Reading Interest Survey

Name: Al Grade: 5 Teacher: Buchanan

How many minutes a day do you read: probably about a half hour

Do you read for enjoyment too or just for homework? For both actually, but I like to do read, but I get real busy.

Do your parents and other relatives read a lot? Not really. Maybe the newspaper.

Do adults at home read out loud to you? Not anymore. When I was a young child they did.

What are your favorite kinds of books? Mystery, suspense, you know thrillers, kind of.

Do you read things other than books? Newspapers, magazines, the internet? Not a lot. Maybe magazines sometimes.

What are some of your favorite activities? Do you ever read about those activities? Can you give an example?
My favorite activities are camping, watching movies, hanging out with my friends. I don't know what you mean by reading about those activities.

What is your favorite subject at school? History. I like hearing about cool stuff like wars.

Do you like reading in that subject? Yeah, but sometimes the history book is hard.

What is one goal you have for yourself as a reader in this class? I want to keep learning about neat stuff, and I want to learn the hard words so it is not so hard when we read out loud.

What is your plan to meet your reading goal? Practice I guess.

As your teacher, how can I help you meet your reading goal? Help me with the words I don't know, and talk to me when we do history.

We can learn quite a bit about Al from his Reading Interest Survey. He appears to see himself as a reader in the context of school and textbook reading. He says he likes mysteries, suspense, and thrillers, yet he also gets "real busy" at home. What is most revealing about Al's RIS is his love of history and yet his apparent struggle with content-specific vocabulary. He is "engaged" with the power of learning history, and he says that he "wants to learn the hard words so it is not so hard to read out loud." Al's ability to "pinpoint" the difficulty he has with reading sets up wonderful instructional and assessment opportunities to address the problem of content-specific vocabulary. Once we demonstrate four or five strategies for understanding vocabulary in concept terms, Al is well on his way to making even more meaningful connections with his love of history through the process of reading.

Decoding Conventions

Question: There are two parts to the essay "A Whale of a Tale." The first is the *article* that describes the care and possible release of J.J. The second part is the "Did You Know…" *list of facts* about whales. How did the two parts of the essay help you to know more about whales? What purpose did each section have?

Al's Answer: Well, in the first part it said whales gain about 2 pounds every hour and that J.J. is probably the healthiest best rested 14 month year old

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whale on this planet and that is the same information that was interesting and fun to read. In the second part it gave information that was also fun and interesting to read like when it said that the blue whale can sit on an elephant's tongue and that a blue whale's heart weighs as much as a Volkswagon beetle car.

Teacher Assessment: Al's response scores a "3" on the Reading an Informational Text Scoring Guide. His response "generally answers the question using some basic text structure language appropriately." He refers to "the first part " and "the second part," demonstrating a basic awareness of the two differently organized forms of text contained in the essay. Further, he provides two good examples from both the article and the list of facts, but the response does not meet the requirements for a "4" or a "5" in that "the examples need to be well-supported and their use clear." Lastly, Al's comment that both parts of the essay are "fun and interesting to read" supports his contention on his RIS that informational texts are interesting to him but also somewhat difficult. His response is still fairly safe and demonstrates a hesitancy to move beyond the question.

Establishing Comprehension

Question: In all kinds of texts, there are details—facts, ideas, and examples—that help explain a subject. There are *significant* details that give readers the most important information about a subject. There are also *supporting* details that give readers additional information about a subject, but these details are not necessarily the most important facts. List one significant and one supporting detail from "A Whale of a Tale" and use your own words to explain why one is significant and one is supporting.

Al's Answer: The significant idea I think is when it says but J.J.'s release won't be easy. I think this is a significant detail because that is what the people are mostly talking about. The supporting idea is I think is when it says for one thing she's huge! The reason I think this is the supporting detail is because this is one of the reasons it won't be easy to release J.J.

Teacher Assessment: Al does a great job on this response. He scores a "4" on the scoring guide for establishing comprehension. He uses comprehension language appropriately—"significant" and "supporting"—and he chooses two details and links them together well with the overall theme of the difficulty associated with J.J.'s release.

The only characteristic of his response that does not fulfill the "5" on the scoring guide is that it does not "build beyond the question using inference and interpretation to support his comprehension."

Realizing Context

Question: In the essay, "A Whale of a Tale," scientists are concerned about J.J.'s ability to care for herself since she is a *baleen* whale. In your own words, explain what "baleen" means and why it is a worry to the scientists.

Al's Answer: Baleen means that a whale has stiff bristles and not real teeth and the scientists are worried that J.J. may have trouble eating all by herself.

Teacher Assessment: Al scores a "3" on the scoring guide for realizing context. His response "generally answers the question" when he says "baleen means that a whale has stiff bristles instead of teeth and the scientists are worried that j.J. may have trouble eating all by herself." Additionally, his response is definitely "close to the surface," and the "whole idea of contextual relationships between many factors and issues is still developing." In a revision of this response, Al might also include the fact that a "baleen" whale filters krill and other small organisms from the ocean, and the fact that, because J.J. has been raised in captivity, she does not know how to use her "baleen" properly.

Developing Interpretation

Question: There is a possibility that J.J. may not survive in the wild ocean on her own. Using facts and quotes from the essay, analyze why it is a good idea to release J.J. or a bad idea to release her. Defend your answer using facts and quotes from the essay.

Al's Answer: I think that they shouldn't put J.J. in the ocean because in the essay it says that J.J. may have problems eating on her own. J.J. is a baleen whale which means she has stiff bristles instead of teeth and so J.J. might not get used to what is in the ocean to eat and then die.

Teacher Assessment: Al scores a "2" on the scoring guide for developing interpretations. His response "generally answers the question," and it "cites very obvious examples from the text" when he says that "JJ is a baleen whale and that means she has stiff bristles instead of teeth." This is a paraphrased quote from the essay. Further, Al's response demonstrates that "connections between the analysis and the examples are not always evident" when he generally alludes to the fact that being a "baleen" whale means that she will not know what to eat in the ocean. Although the majority of Al's response matches the indicators for a "3," the fact that he did not include any direct quotes or specific facts from the essay drops it into the "2" category.

Integrating for Synthesis

Question: Using facts from the essay, list in order the five most important details that have led to the possible release of JJ. After listing the details in order, write two to three sentences that explain why you chose those particular details.

Al's Answer: 1. Before she could return to her natural home, J.J. had to grow strong. 2. A 32 foot long sling has been designed to load her onto the back of a tank and then onto a boat. 3. She is probably the healthiest best rested 14 month old gray whale on this planet. 4. If J.J.'s release goes well, it might lead to the freeing of other captive whales, including Keiko, the killer whale from the Free Willy movies. 5. I think she'll be happier living in the ocean.

I chose these details because in the beginning they said she just has to grow strong and then they have designed a sling for her. They might release other whales and they're sure that they'll miss her.

Teacher Assessment: Al scores a "3" on the scoring guide for integrating for synthesis. He adequately answers the questions including the two components of listing five details and then providing analysis for his choices. His analysis, however, fits exactly into the indicator descriptions. His response "cites 'safe' examples and parallel development is not visible." The response is also "somewhat disjointed." Al's skill in sequencing and analysis is still definitely in development, but his desire to respond to the question's components is rewarded on the scoring guide. It provides an example of having the framework in place and needing some experience with modeling of "5" examples to see where his response can ultimately go.

Critiquing for Evaluation

Question: Using quotes and facts from the essay, challenge this statement: "Having been raised by humans, J.J. will have a hard time learning to be a whale." Do you think it is a true statement or untrue? Explain your answer.

Al's Answer: I think this is a true statement because J.J. hasn't been having krill for food like she should be. Instead, they're feeding her squid and fish. It even quotes in the essay, now they are hoping that J.J. will learn to eat krill once she's back in the ocean.

Teacher Assessment: Al's response scores a "2" on the scoring guide for critiquing for evaluation. His response "generally answers the question," but it still stays very close to the literal issues raised in the essay instead of rising to the larger "universal" issues displayed in the question. Again, not using a direct quote hurts Al's score on the response because it does not fulfill the requested elements of the question. His use of one specific example, "J.J. hasn't been having krill like she should be," is once again "somewhat safe and only connected to other ideas in fairly limited ways," as stated on the scoring guide.

Overall Teacher Assessment: We now have a picture of Al's ability to respond in depth using his critical reading skills in this qualitative assessment. If we show his scores and placements across the range of the traits, they look like this:

	Conventions	*Comprehension*	*Context*	*Interpretation*	*Synthesis*	*Evaluation*
Informational Text Scoring Guide	3	4	3	2	3	2

One of Al's strengths as a reader is his desire to work hard to achieve success. This desire is demonstrated through his willingness to respond to the questions as fully as he is capable. His critical reading depth will soon come along when he is shown models of other successful responses. In a one-on-one interview with Al, we talked about his strength area, establishing comprehension, and discussed ways to "move beyond the question" and demonstrate more risk-taking with his answers. He confided in the researcher, "I'd like to put more into my answers, but I am always afraid of being wrong." By using the Traits of an Effective Reader Scoring Guide, Al can strengthen and develop his critical reading ability while seeing positive growth through the use of a scoring guide that supports and encourages the growing strength and confidence of his responses.

Student Work Samples: Aspen, Fifth Grade

Let's look at one more student sample. Aspen, a classmate of Al's, is also in fifth grade in Gladstone, Oregon. Let's look at Aspen's reading interest survey.

Reading Interest Survey:

Name: Aspen Grade: 5 Teacher: Buchanan

How many minutes a day do you read: usually about 1 hour or so; it depends on how much homework I have.

Do you read for enjoyment too or just for homework? I read for both, and sometimes I keep reading in my school books even though I am done.

Do your parents and other relatives read a lot? Yes, I guess so. They read the newspaper, work on the computer, and help my sister and I with our homework.

Do adults at home read out loud to you? No, in fact, they make me read out loud to them!

What are your favorite kinds of books? I like to read mystery novels, and really good books like Cynthia Voigt and Jane Yolen. They're my favorite authors.

Do you read things other than books? Newspapers, magazines, the internet? Yes, I like to read a lot of different things. My mom always lets me get a magazine at the store when she buys one too.

What are some of your favorite activities? Do you ever read about those activities? Can you give an example?
My favorite activities are playing with my friends, going to my dance class, and singing in choir in school. I don't really read about those activities, but I might if I knew where they had books like that.

What is your favorite subject at school? Definitely reading and writing workshop. I work on things the whole time, and I love to conference with Mrs. Buchanan. She's the best.

Do you like reading in that subject? I have read almost our whole book even though we haven't had all those assignments.

What is one goal you have for yourself as a reader in this class? I want to read Oprah's book list, but my mom says it is too hard for me. I would like to just try.

What is your plan to meet your reading goal? I think I'll have to go to the public library to get some of her books. But, they do have them at Starbucks, so maybe I can get them there.

As your teacher, how can I help you meet your reading goal? Help me with words I don't know, but also tell me about books you think I would like. Not just novels, you know, but all kinds.

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We can learn quite a bit about Aspen's identity as a reader from her Reading Interest Survey. She has a strong personal identity as a reader, naming her favorite authors and genres; she reads at home, and distinguishes between reading for homework and for pleasure. Her interest in academic reading, and thus, we can assume, informational text reading through her textbooks, goes beyond the boundaries of the homework assignment for that day. Aspen also demonstrates a strong interest in the reading and writing connection. With state standards around the country also proposing a committed link between reading and writing, Aspen has the potential for demonstrating that strong link on large-scale performance assessment tests.

Decoding Conventions

Question: There are two parts to the essay "A Whale of a Tale." The first is the *article* that describes the care and possible release of J.J. The second part is the "Did You Know..." *list of facts* about whales. How did the two parts of the essay help you to know more about whales? What purpose did each section have?

Aspen's Answer: Well the "whale of a tale" purpose was to tell me about one specific whale—JJ—the whale who was found and raised at Sea World, and the "did you know" purpose was to tell me interesting facts about all whales in general. Like one fact was that a blue whale's heart was as big a VW Bug car. The two parts of the essay helped me learn about whales by making it easy to understand both one whale and also whales in general and they kept it interesting too. The two parts worked together because I learned about how amazing it was that such a huge whale was raised in captivity.

Teacher Assessment: Aspen scores a "4" on the scoring guide for decoding conventions. Her response is strong and she demonstrates "beyond-the-question thinking" when she says "the two parts work together because I learned about how amazing it was that such a huge whale was raised in captivity." Her examples are well-chosen, and they just miss the "5" indicator of making clear, strong connections. One other small area of improvement could take place in her use of text structure language.

Establishing Comprehension

Question: In all kinds of texts, there are details—facts, ideas, and examples—that help explain a subject. There are *significant* details that give readers the most important information about a subject. There are also *supporting* details that give readers additional information about a subject, but these details are not necessarily the most important facts. List one significant and one supporting detail from "A Whale of a Tale" and use your own words to explain why one is significant and one is supporting.

Aspen's Answer: "It's too hard for scientists to collect that much krill, so they've fed J.J. squid and fish." I think this is significant because it's important that J.J. be able to find enough food to eat. This quote tells you about a major theme in the story. "Animal rescuers named her J.J." This is a supporting detail, because even though it's nice to know her name you would still know what the story was about without it. It also supports the major theme because wild whales don't have names, and J.J. is a whale in captivity.

Teacher Assessment: Aspen scores a "5" on the scoring guide for establishing comprehension. Her response "demonstrates a purposeful, expansive, and knowledgeable comprehension of an informational text." Her response directly answers the question and even moves into considerations of theme which use inferential and interpretative levels of comprehension. Aspen's chosen examples—krill and eating habits—concern the central factor determining whether J.J. will be successful at living on her own in the wild. This is a top-notch response!

Realizing Context

Question: In the essay "A Whale of a Tale," scientists are concerned about J.J.'s ability to care for herself since she is a *baleen* whale. In your own words, explain what "baleen" means and why it is a worry to the scientists.

Aspen's Answer: Baleen means she has stiff bristles on her teeth for catching krill and since she has to eat 2,400 pounds of krill a day, scientists fed her squid and fish instead. They are worried that she may not find enough to eat. If she even develops a taste for krill it will be miracle.

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Teacher Assessment: Aspen scores a "4" on the scoring guide for realizing context. Her response is strong and specific; she defines the term "baleen," she uses the example of 2,400 pounds of krill a day, and she reports the choice the scientists made to feed her squid and fish instead. Her connection between the vocabulary term "baleen" and the theme of the essay (the scientists' worry that J.J. may not survive in the wild) is fairly clear when she says "they are worried that she may not find enough to eat and if she develops a taste for krill it will be a miracle," but she doesn't push farther to discuss an "indepth understanding of contextual relationships," as demanded by the indicators of a "5."

Developing Interpretation

Question: There is a possibility that J.J. may not survive in the wild ocean on her own. Using facts and quotes from the essay, analyze why it is a good idea to release J.J. or a bad idea to release her. Defend your answer using facts and quotes from the essay.

Aspen's Answer: In some ways, I think they should release J.J. but I also don't think they should so I'll defend both answers. Why yes? Well when they found J.J. she only weighed 1,660 pounds and now she weighs over 17,000, and she is still growing rapidly. Also scientist Jim Sumich says "she is probably the healthiest 14 month old whale in the world!" Why no? Because she's been nurtured since she was a newborn at Sea World. She has never had to hunt for food so she may not survive. I don't know how I would resolve this problem. I guess the best way is to decide what's more important—freedom or living longer. What do you think?

Teacher Assessment: Aspen would score a "4" on the scoring guide for developing interpretations. Her response is wonderful; it is thoughtful, impassioned, and aware of larger universal issues. In some large-scale testing situations, Aspen would likely be penalized for not choosing one interpretation and defending it. But in this classroom assessment, we encouraged the students to be risk-takers and independent thinkers, and Aspen's response demonstrates this quality. The response fulfills most of the indicators for the "5" on the scoring guide: it directly addresses the question, it uses specific evidence, it even makes use of an expert authority by citing Jim Sumich's quote. However, it does not achieve a "5" status because, although it addresses the question well, it does not choose one stance, thereby weakening the overall interpretation.

Integrating for Synthesis

Question: Using facts from the essay, list in order the five most important details that have led to the possible release of J.J. After listing the details in order, write two to three sentences that explain why you chose those particular details.

Aspen's Answer: 1) J.J. gulped up the milk gaining 10,340 pounds, and she is healthy 2) She has never eaten krill before 3) She has been raised in sight of the killer whale tank 4) she does not remember the open ocean or how to migrate 5) She deserves a chance for freedom.

The five details I chose show that even though some of the odds are against JJ surviving, some of the odds do support her living in freedom. This article reminds me of kids leaving home someday. You have to let them go someday.

Teacher Assessment: Aspen scores a "4" on the scoring guide for integrating for synthesis. Her response demonstrates a level of achievement exactly between the indicators of "5" and "3." She answers the question fairly well; she does not employ synthesis language, yet her details have a strong parallel connection that demonstrates her understanding of this text's theme in comparison with other experiences (leaving home). However, the response does not yet integrate multiple sources and build them into one harmonious whole.

Critiquing for Evaluation

Question: Using quotes and facts from the essay, challenge this statement: "Having been raised by humans, J.J. will have a hard time learning to be a whale." Do you think it is a true statement or untrue? Explain your answer.

Aspen's Answer: True, because she's been nurtured her whole life and has never had to hunt. Humans have always provided everything for J.J. so she may not know what to do when released. I think she will have a hard time learning to be wild again. But, maybe she will have some instinct to do what baleen whales are supposed to do. The scientists are experts and they must have thought that she could do it, or they wouldn't have let her go.

Teacher Assessment: Aspen scores a "4" on the scoring guide for critiquing for evaluation. Her response is thorough and thoughtful; it makes good use of examples and connects them to other ideas. The response does move beyond the parameters of the question. The only thing missing from Aspen's response is direct quotation to support her evaluation of J.J.'s situation. Without defensible evidence, Aspen's argument does not carry as much weight as it could. This is an excellent "teaching sample" for helping Aspen to improve the quality of her responses. In an one-on-one conference, Aspen's teacher could nurture her growth as a reader by encouraging her to make a selection of quotes and then integrate them into her response.

Overall Teacher Assessment: We now have a picture of Aspen's ability to respond in depth using her critical reading skills in this qualitative assessment. If we show her scores and placements across the range of the traits, they look like this:

	Conventions	*Comprehension*	*Context*	*Interpretation*	*Synthesis*	*Evaluation*
Informational Text Scoring Guide	4	5	4	4	4	4

Aspen is a skilled, thoughtful, and critical reader. She scores well on all of the traits and exceptionally well on the trait of comprehension. Aspen's responses consistently demonstrate a "reading beyond the question" ability, and an excellent selection of details and examples to illustrate her critical reading. Yet Aspen's growth as a reader can continue. An assessment of skills reveals that she can reach farther in her responses, mainly through the selection and use of quotes to support her suppositions. With this addition to her critical reading ability, Aspen will be well on her way to producing verifiable, defensible, and thoughtfully grounded responses that will serve her well in secondary education and beyond.

Lesson Plans for Each of the Traits of an Effective Reader

Next in this chapter, we've created six assessment opportunities—one for each trait—for you to use in your intermediate classroom. We've described how each "task" or "tool" fits within the ongoing or cumulative category, the qualitative or quantitative category, and, of course, we've described how to offer your students plenty of voice and choice.

DECODING CONVENTIONS: Buddy Reading

Assessment type: *task*
Type of task or tool: *ongoing; qualitative or quantitative*
Voice: *high; individual and partner participation*
Choice: *moderate; selection of texts*
Skill focus: *oral fluency; text structure knowledge; conventions knowledge*
Selected Text: *Grade-level appropriate with two parts; Maya Angelou's* Life Doesn't Frighten Me at All *is a great choice*
Suggested age group: *intermediate*
Time required: *25-30 minutes*

Description:

This is an activity in which students pair together to perform oral interviews. Students from common reading levels pair together, or readers from different grades can pair together. Really, the possibilities are endless! Have the students jointly pick out a text. They need to look for common interests, possibly the use of dialogue, and also a text that reflects a clear text structure. Not only do they read the book together, but they also follow the reading with questions for one another that reflect the text structure.

Materials/Preparation:

1) Make sure each "partner" team has a well-selected title to read out loud.
2) Have a list of read-aloud clues available for self-monitoring. Some examples might include: When I read, do I sound like I am talking? When I read, do I pay attention to my speed? When I read, do I listen for the stops in the right places?
3) Have a list of text structure questions available for oral interviews. Some examples might include: What genre is this text? How do I know? What is one "special" punctuation mark that indicated meaning to me? Why is it special? How does it connect to meaning? How do the text and the illustrations match up together? Why did the author make it like that?

What to Do:

1) Have the student partners decide together how they want to "approach" their text. Do they want to play "roles" and take turns playing the narrator? Do they want to read page by page? What is their format?
2) Read the text out loud.

3) Have the students take turns being the "interviewer" and the "interviewee."
4) Have the students write up a brief "text structure" summary. What do we know about this text through its structure?
5) Meet as a whole class and have different partner sets talk about their texts. Keep track on a graph or a list of the different types of genres and characteristics of those genres the different teams described.

Desired Outcomes:

- Students learn to read and approach texts collaboratively
- Students develop, on their own, a recognition of genre and accompanying characteristics
- Students see the connection between punctuation and meaning in texts
- Students see similarities and differences between genres

ESTABLISHING COMPREHENSION: Post-it® Notes

Assessment type: ***task***
Type of task or tool: ***ongoing; qualitative or quantitative***
Voice: ***high; individual participation***
Choice: ***moderate; selection of details***
Skill focus: ***components of comprehension: details, characters, turning moments***
Selected text: ***grade-level appropriate; Sandra Cisneros's short story, "Eleven" is a great choice***
Suggested age group: ***intermediate***
Time required: ***30-40 minutes***

Description:

This is a great task for establishing comprehension. One of its wonderful features is the fact that the product—notes on Post-it® Notes—crosses reading ability levels, so it works especially well with emerging readers. Students are given a short text (the short story, "Eleven," is a great choice for an intermediate grade level) and encouraged to point out major and minor characters, significant and supporting events, and turning moments using Post-it® Notes. When a "reading conversation" begins, everyone has something assigned to five Post-it® Notes. The process of organizing one's thoughts and placing them strategically on the text itself is especially valuable for our kinetic learners. Through the process of selecting, placing, confirming, and even moving the Post-it® Notes, students are connecting with their reading, thinking selves.

Materials/Preparation:

1) Hand every student six Post-it® Notes, the larger the better.
2) Define the terms: major and minor characters, significant and supporting events, and turning moments.
3) Pass out copies of a short text—stories or essays work best—or use a passage from a textbook.

What to Do:

1) Have the students write the terms "major character," "minor character," "significant event," "supporting event," and "turning moment," one term each, on their Post-it® Notes.

2) Have the students read the short story, placing Post-it® Notes where they see the major or minor character, events, and turning moments. The extra Post-it® Note can be used for something special.
3) After completing the story, have the students go back and write their reasons for choosing their particular selections.
4) Have a group discussion in which students state why they made their choices. If disagreement comes up, for instance, over whether a character is major or minor, have the disagreeing students talk about their reasoning and see whether the characteristics describing textual clues can be clarified.

Desired Outcome:

- Students develop and demonstrate purposeful comprehension skills
- Students recognize and make distinctions between major and minor, significant and supporting
- Students support their comprehension of a text through analysis and evidence
- Students see how parts of a text work together toward creating a whole

REALIZING CONTEXT: Book Experts

Assessment type: *tool*
Type of task or tool: *cumulative; qualitative and quantitative*
Voice: *high; individual participation*
Choice: *high; selection of texts*
Skill focus: *components of context: vocabulary, setting, tone, voice, author's intent, cultural and social implications*
Selected text: *grade-level appropriate;* Hatchet *by Gary Paulsen;* Tracker *by Gary Paulsen*
Suggested age group: *intermediate*
Time required: *20 minutes per presentation*

Description:

This is the critical-thinking revision of the old standby—the book report. Readers select a book title, read it, and prepare an oral "discussion" as the "book expert." Readers prepare four answers to facilitator-posed questions, and then class members take turns writing their own questions for the "book expert." Each "book talk" takes approximately 20 minutes, and students then self-assess their performances, using the criteria of the trait of realizing context as guidelines.

Materials/Preparation:

1) Model one "book talk" for your students before assigning them.
2) Make your criteria for success in format and content very clear up front.
3) Have students prepare answers to these four questions: (a) What does your audience need to know about this book to ask good questions about its purpose? (b) What background or context knowledge does your audience need to know about to ask a question about setting? (c) What is one significant problem in the book, article, or essay that you would like to resolve? (d) Would you or wouldn't you recommend this book to a friend, and why?
4) Model good audience participation for your students.
5) Demonstrate what is involved in asking good questions.
6) Discuss the skills of realizing context so that students connect their role as "expert" with the trait and skill of realizing context.

What to Do:

1) Have "book talk" sign-ups.
2) Have the designated student prepare his or her four answers to assigned questions.
3) Pass out 3x5 cards to students in audience.
4) Have book expert give his or her "book talk."
5) Encourage audience members to take notes.
6) Have students write their questions for the "book expert" on 3x5 cards.
7) Pass the questions forward, and have facilitator select three or four to answer.
8) Have student speaker self-assess "book talk." What did I do well? What can I improve on? What was one example of using evidence well to back up my inferences?

Desired Outcomes:

- Students demonstrate skills to related to the three levels of realizing context
- Students move beyond literal comprehension and practice inference skills in preparation of the book talk
- Students demonstrate ability in responding to critical thinking questions
- Students engage in critical discourse with peers

DEVELOPING INTERPRETATIONS: Interpreting Art

Assessment type: *task*
Type of task or tool: *ongoing; qualitative and quantitative*
Voice: *high; individual participation and group participation*
Choice: *low; pre-selected "art"*
Skill focus: *components of interpretation: identifying problems, looking for clues, analyzing problems, connecting interpretations to bigger pictures*
Selected text: *selections of "classical art;" Evelyn Coleman's* White Socks Only *is a wonderful follow-up text.*
Suggested age group: *intermediate*
Time required: *20 minutes for problem-solving; 20 minutes for discussion*

Description:

In this fun, fun, fun activity, students have the opportunity to study pieces of art and develop "interpretations" based on a visual text. They follow a set of criteria, looking for problems, gaps, or ambiguities in the "picture" in front of them. They pose interpretations, then revise them based on gathering more information or clues. Contextual information such as the artist's name, historical period, and cultural connections all become increasingly valuable as students begin to see the connections between inferences and interpretations.

Materials/Preparation:

1) Select some pieces of art to show your students. Hint: Art involving human subjects is usually most compelling, as students like to figure out relationship connections.
2) Have color overheads made of your selections.
3) Prepare students by drawing some connections between text and pictures. Example: Can pictures without words tell stories? How do you know?

What to Do:

1) Put your sample piece of art on the overhead. Ask your students: What problems do you see here? Is there anything in this picture that doesn't make sense? Is there a question you wish you could ask the artist?
2) Have students work in small groups of three to four. Have them collaborate, choosing one "problem" they wish to resolve.

3) Have your students study the picture and list as many clues as they can find that explains the problem or gives important information about the problem.

4) Have your student groups make a one-sentence interpretation that resolves the problem through interpretation.

5) Give your students more information—artist's name, biographical background, social or cultural background, historical time period, and so forth.

6) Have your students "revise" their interpretations based on the new clues.

7) Put your interpretations together on the blackboard or the overhead. Which ones used the best evidence or choices of "clues" to form their interpretations? Why are these the stronger arguments?

8) Turn to a text in your class. Follow the four-step process using text now instead of pictures. Watch their confidence grow!

Desired Outcomes:

- Students experiment, develop, and demonstrate the skills of interpretation
- Student learn that "defensible" interpretations using clues and evidence are valuable
- Students learn that it is "okay" and even preferable to "revise" interpretations based on more information

INTEGRATING FOR SYNTHESIS: Finding Similarities and Differences

Assessment type: *task*
Type of task or tool: *ongoing; qualitative and quantitative*
Voice: *high; individual participation and group participation*
Choice: *moderate; self-selected details*
Skill focus: *demonstrating comparison/contrast and cause and effect*
Selected text: *Gary Paulsen's chapter "Nativity" from his book* **Puppies, Doggies, and Blue Northers: Reflections on Being Raised by a Pack of Sled Dogs;** *Beth Spanjian's* Baby Wolf
Suggested age group: *intermediate*
Time required: *20 minutes for reading two texts; 20 minutes for list-making and discussion*

Description:

This task asks students to read two texts and then compare and contrast them by finding similarities and differences in their subject matter, selection of detail, and theme. After brainstorming a master list as a group, students then respond to a written question using their list as a reference. The two books selected here are wonderful teaching tools because Paulsen's text is rich and complex, whereas Spanjian's text is simple and general. Although the activity is not designed to elicit evaluations of the texts, students naturally begin evaluative comments as they synthesize the quality of the details and the content of the two texts.

Materials/Preparation:

1) Get copies of both books.
2) Create a chart for listing similarities and differences. For younger groups you may want to use the terminology: "What is the same? What is different?"
3) Prepare students for read-aloud time. Provide a list of vocabulary words that may be problematic.
4) Conduct an "Anticipation Guide" to see how much prior knowledge students have concerning wolves and dogs. (See Chapter 4 for a discussion of Anticipation Guides.)

What to Do:

1) Read both texts aloud to students
2) Ask them to choose partners and, from memory, to list all the details that are the same in both texts.
3) Ask them then to list the details that are different in the two texts.

4) Create a chart, and ask students to begin filling in both columns with oral comments.
5) Discuss the two columns.
6) Ask students to respond silently in their Reader's Notebooks to this question: "Which text is more effective in telling you what the relationship between mother dogs/wolves and puppy dogs/wolves is really like? Defend your answer by using information from our two lists." Another question that you might ask is: "Is Cookie like other dogs you know? Why or why not? Use information from your list in your answer."
7) Have your students share their responses with each other and even create a "bulletin board of responses" for others to see and read.

Desired Outcomes:

- Students understand and practice the skills of comparing and contrasting
- Students understand and demonstrate the skill of cause-and-effect understanding
- Students implement beginning evaluation strategies by integrating various texts through synthesis
- Students demonstrate the ability to compare texts to personal background knowledge

CRITIQUING FOR EVALUATION: Dear Reader Letters

Assessment type: *tool*
Type of task or tool: *cumulative; qualitative and quantitative*
Voice: *high; individual participation*
Choice: *high; completely self-created evaluation responding to criteria*
Skill focus: *demonstrating evaluation skills*
Selected text: *individual student level appropriate*
Suggested age group: *intermediate*
Time required: *class time for brainstorming, composing, revising, editing, and writing up finished product*

Description:

In **Dear Reader Letters**, students take on the persona of a favorite author and defend character, plot, events, or issues decisions and depictions by the author. As in a "Dear Mr. Blueberry Letter," students take on the role of informer, evaluator, defender, and clarifier. Students select a component of the text, pose a question as a "reader," and then proceed to answer the question as the author.

Materials/Preparation:

1) Model a sample **Dear Reader Letter** for your students.
2) Talk about the effective parts of your **Dear Reader Letter**.
3) Ask your students for revision suggestions for your letter.
4) Incorporate revisions, going back to your text to look for quotes.

What to Do:

1) Have students select texts.
2) Have students pose a question they want answered as a "reader."
3) Brainstorm your response.
4) Ask students to respond to these criteria: (a) choose a single issue; (b) express your opinion about the issue; (c) raise questions; (d) answer the questions using clues and evidence from the text; (e) put the issue into context considering other factors; and (f) make a solid, defensible judgement using all of the gathered information.
5) Have students share responses with a neighbor.
6) Have them make suggestions for revision and clarification.

7) Have them then revise **Dear Reader Letters**.
8) Collect **Dear Reader Letters**, and conference with each student to discuss scores based on the scoring guide.

Desired Outcomes:

- Students practice, hone, and improve critical evaluation skills
- Students become aware of the power of well-defended critical judgments
- Students learn to respond to criteria and revise their thinking
- Students express critical reading skills through the combination of written and oral defense

Suggested Titles for Read Aloud and Read Alone

Angelou, Maya. *Life Doesn't Frighten Me.* New York: Stewart, Tabori, and Chang, 1993. ISBN: 1-55670-288-4

Cisneros, Sandra. *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories.* New York: Random House, 1991. ISBN:0-679-73856-8

Coleman, Evelyn. *White Socks Only.* New York: Albert Whitman Publishers, 1996. ISBN: 0-8075-8955-1

Paulsen, Gary. *Puppies, Dogs and Blue Northers: Reflections on Being Raised by a Pack of Sled Dogs.* New York: Harcourt Brace, 1996. ISBN: 0-1529-2881-2

Spanjian, Beth. *Baby Wolf.* New York: Western Publishing Company, 1988. ISBN: 0-307-12598-X

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[1] Gambrell, Linda and Janice F. Almasi, eds. *Lively Discussions! Fostering Engaged Reading* Newark, Delaware: IRA Publications, 1996, pp.134.
[2] Lobel, Arnold. *Fables.* NY: Harper Collins, 1980. Pp.23
[3] Kramer, Stephen. *Lightning.* Minneapolis: Carolrhoda Books, 1992. Pp.10.
[4] *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language,* 3rd Edition, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992, pp. 594.

Chapter Four

The Middle-School Years: Reading Across the Content Areas

> Reading is a transaction between reader and text, and all we really know about a text is what we make of it, and that what we make of it depends on what we bring to it. A reading is not a static artifact but a dynamic event in time, from before the text is chosen to beyond the echoes of the final discussion about it. Reading then, even within a reader's mind, is a collaborative act. Moreover, the context for reading, the purposes and projects for reading, and the cultural background for reading have such powerful constraints on meaning. Reading is social, and different social arrangements make reading a different kind of experience. What teachers are trying to do is put into the air of the classroom the kinds of conversations they hope their students will internalize for their independent reading. Decision-making in the teaching of reading is always a matter of asking, 'What do these students need to learn to do?' and then asking, 'What kind of conversations best support that and lead to independence and structuring opportunities for such conversations in the classroom?[1]

Levels of Intervention: Assessment of Prior Knowledge in Content Areas

Randy Bomer's words ring true for the middle-school reader attempting to construct meaning from not only narrative and informational texts, but also multiple texts across the content areas. What we know about a text is what we make of it, and what we make of it is what we bring to it. If, as Bomer contends, "the context for reading, the purposes and projects for reading, and the cultural background for reading have such powerful constraints on meaning," then our readers are facing a formidable task of initiating meaningful interaction with content-area texts based on context, background knowledge, purpose, and cultural background. If these "framework-building" skills are not in place, then can student readers truly demonstrate their level of achievement in critical reading?

Middle-school students *are* capable of reading well across the content areas. As Rachel Billmeyer, a reading-across-the-content-areas expert, affirms, "improvement in higher-level reading skills cannot come about simply by an emphasis on reading instruction in isolation from the other work students do in school. Students must learn to read in all content areas. Every teacher must be a reading teacher."[2] Billmeyer's contention that reading skills do not belong solely to the province of language arts classes is well taken. Our middle-school students must learn to read math, science, history, psychology, foreign language, physical education, health, and vocational education texts, as well as those in the language arts. In order for students to interact with, comprehend, and construct meaning in each of these areas, all educators need to understand the process of constructing meaning. Bomer states that meaning is constrained by the factors of context, purpose, and the cultural background of both the text and the student. If we practice strategies to assess students' level of knowledge in each of these three areas prior to introducing a new subject or even a new text, we will help students build a strong frame of reference for their content-area reading. With a frame in place to help construct reading, readers can more easily interact with and understand the subject matter. Let's look at three strategies to assess students' level of knowledge with content material. All three strategies—the Anticipation Guide, the K-W-L Chart, and the Vocabulary Elaboration Strategy—indicate levels of *teacher intervention* necessary and are designed to help students construct meaningful comprehension, interpretation, and evaluation of texts.

Pre-Reading Assessment: The Anticipation Guide

Even before students start to read a new text, they have begun their process of interacting with it through listening to the instructions accompanying the assignment. I remember teaching a sophomore literature class at the university level during my college teaching career. We were reading Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter*. As a new teacher, I asked my students to read the first 40 pages of Hawthorne's novel outside class and then be prepared to discuss it. When they all filed back into class two days later and I began my lecture on "The Custom House," all the students stared blankly at me and uneasily at each other. Finally, one brave soul raised his hand and said, "Dr. Thompson, did we read the same novel? You're talking about something called 'The Custom House,' and we read the first chapter of *The Scarlet Letter* about Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale. Did we do something wrong?"

Well, what went wrong was the lack of a pre-reading assessment before the beginning of the reading process. "The Custom House" is the introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*, and my students hadn't bothered to read the introduction; according to their understanding of my instructions, they were to read the first 40 pages of the *novel*. For my part, I assumed that they understood that "The Custom House" is not an introduction in the traditional sense, that is, commentary provided by an outside editor or critic, but rather an integral part of the novel itself, used by Hawthorne to comment on contemporary politics. Oops! Knowing what I know now, I would assess my students' level of knowledge regarding Hawthorne, his writings, his historical time period, and the methods he uses to convey his subject before asking them to begin reading his work.

For this chapter, we will be looking at student samples surrounding the reading of an informational article entitled, "Rediscovering Jamestown." (The complete text of the article is reprinted in the Appendix.) The lesson would begin with a pre-reading assessment known as an Anticipation Guide.

ANTICIPATION GUIDE for "Rediscovering Jamestown"

What state was the Jamestown colony in?

When was Jamestown dedicated?

What happened to Jamestown in 1608?

How does math play a role in archeology?

Is this a true statement: "Archeology is like a time machine" ?

What do you anticipate finding out about Jamestown based on these questions?

After reading and answering these questions, student readers have a mental "frame" for what elements will be covered in the article. Did you catch the trick in the first question? There were no states in 1607, only colonies! Certainly the historical period, the location of the site, the role of archeology in discovering history, and the use of math in archeology are all issues that the article addresses and we anticipate in the thoughtful framing of these questions. Further, the Anticipation Guide "anticipates" how students respond to statements like "Archeology is like a time machine." Through a guided discussion, students can air their reactions to statements that address the purpose of the text. Also, in the final question, students are asked to make predictions about the article based on the anticipation guide. This investment of student engagement engenders "active learning." Predictions are investments; students want to know if their predictions were accurate. The Anticipation Guide is a simple assessment tool that gauges students' level of prior knowledge or background knowledge in regard to a subject; it assesses their level of contextual knowledge concerning a subject and accompanying issues (Jamestown is the subject; math and archeology provide the frame in which it is discussed); and finally, it assesses levels of knowledge regarding the cultural implications of an archeological dig in a location immersed in associations with early American history.

The K-W-L Chart

After the use of an Anticipation Guide for pre-assessment of knowledge and background level, a K-W-L Chart is a natural follow-up assessment tool. A K-W-L Chart provides three columns in which students can organize and list their information. For the "Rediscovering Jamestown" article, it looks like this:

K-W-L Chart

What do I know about Jamestown before I even begin reading this article?	**What would I like to know about Jamestown? Also, what predictions do I have for this article?**	**What did I learn about Jamestown that I found surprising? What were my predictions that were confirmed?**

Students can fill out the first two columns of this organizational tool. Now, armed with background knowledge confirmed or gained, with a sense of the article's purpose, and with an awareness of the cultural importance of Jamestown's history to our country's identity, student readers are ready to begin reading the article.

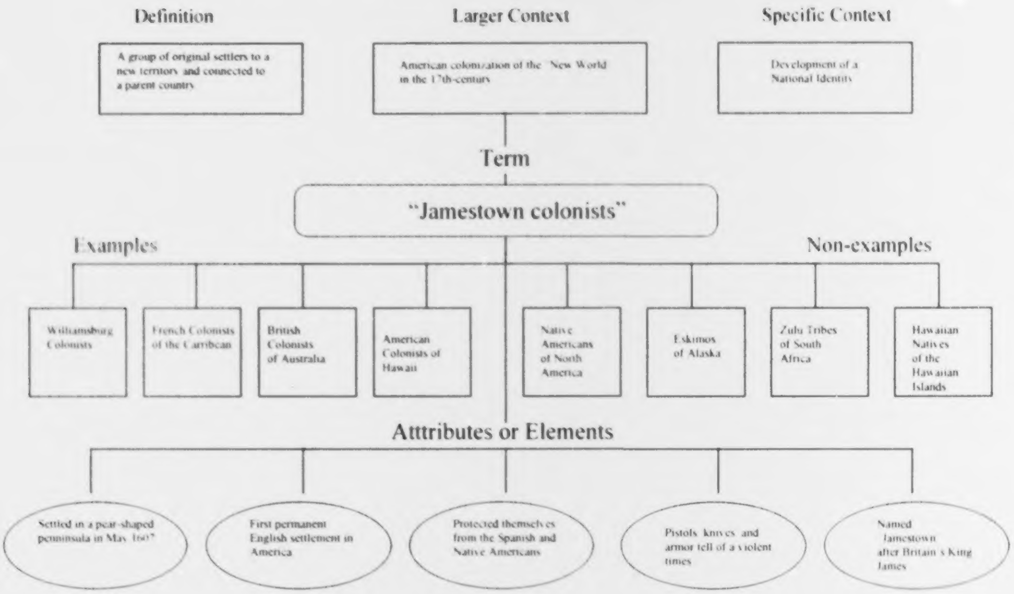
Vocabulary Elaboration Strategy

After reading a new text, students have two opportunities to confirm their constructed meaning. The first is to complete the final column of the K-W-L Chart. In the final column, students can list surprising events, themes, discoveries, and ideas. Also, this is the place to confirm earlier predictions and cement the connections between context, purpose, and background. Both the anticipation guide and the K-W-L Chart help assess student level of knowledge in regard to a subject matter, but what about recognition, understanding, and application of new vocabulary terms? This is the focus of our last intervention assessment: the Vocabulary Elaboration Strategy.[3]

The chronological order of these three assessment strategies is deliberate. The anticipation guide assesses students' *pre-reading* knowledge; the K-W-L Chart assesses their *pre-reading* knowledge and *during-reading* comprehension of the text; and the Vocabulary Elaboration Strategy assesses their *post-reading* comprehension of the text.

After having students read "Rediscovering Jamestown," a facilitator can assess student comprehension by selecting important vocabulary words from the text and asking students to demonstrate their understanding of the terms. Let's select the term "Jamestown colonists." I think we all agree that without a solid understanding of the term "Jamestown colonists," student comprehension of this article would be severely limited. There is a picture on the following page of the term and all of its contexts, examples, connections, and characteristics.

Stephen's Vocabulary Elaboration Strategy


Definition
Larger Context
Specific Context
A group of original settlers to a new territory and connected to a parent country
American colonization of the "New World in the 17th-century
Development of a National Identity
Term
"Jamestown colonists"
Examples
Non-examples
Williamsburg Colonists
French Colonists of the Carribean
British Colonists of Australia
American Colonists of Hawaii
Native Americans of North America
Eskimos of Alaska
Zulu Tribes of South Africa
Hawaiian Natives of the Hawaiian Islands
Atttributes or Elements
Settled in a pear-shaped penninsula in May 1607
First permanent English settlement in America
Protected themselves from the Spanish and Native Americans
Pistols knives and armor tell of a violent times
Named Jamestown after Britain's King James

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First, see that our selected term, "Jamestown colonists," is located right in the middle of the graphic organizer, in the box labeled "term." Then, students are asked, either individually or in groups, to provide a larger subject area in the top middle box, labeled "larger context.". We have written, "American colonization of the 'New World' in the 17th-century." In the top box to the left, students are asked to define the term in their own words. We have defined it as, "A group of original settlers to a new territory and connected to a parent country." For the specific context definition in the top box on the right-hand side, we've written, "Development of a National Identity." Now, if we look below the term to the examples section in the middle, we can see that several parallel examples to the Jamestown colonists (the "Williamsburg colonists," the "French colonists of the Caribbean," the "British colonists of Australia," and the "American colonists of Hawaii") are listed, as examples of people who colonized the land where they lived. On the non-example side, we see "Native Americans of North America," "Eskimos of Alaska," "Zulu Tribes of South Africa," and "Hawaiians Natives of the Hawaiian Islands," as examples of people who did not colonize the land where they lived. For the bottom section of the graphic organizer, note the variety of characteristics assigned to the Jamestown colonists that distinguish them from other colonists. The attributes include: "settled in a pear-shaped peninsula in May 1607"; "first permanent

English settlement in America"; "protected themselves from the Spanish and Native Americans"; "pistols, knives, and armor tell of violent times"; and "named 'Jamestown' after Britain's King James."

When students complete this graphic organizer, we have a full picture of their comprehension of this text. Similar to the work discussed in Chapter 3, an understanding of vocabulary as concepts rather than merely as isolated words is imperative to understanding vocabulary in informational texts. The Vocabulary Elaboration Strategy allows students to "elaborate" on their understanding of the texts, demonstrating their layers and levels of knowledge, and to synthesize their understanding in a graphic form.

All three methods—the Anticipation Guide, the K-W-L Chart, and the Vocabulary Elaboration Strategy—demonstrate various ways of assessing what students need to know to tackle the acknowledged powerful constraints on meaning: context, background knowledge, purpose of text, and cultural background. Applicable to any content area, the three methods can be imposed on a variety of reading situations to ensure that students are prepared to read with comprehension and then demonstrate their critical reading skills effectively on paper.

Now let's turn to two student samples. Taylor and Jake are middle-school students from Anchorage, Alaska. We're going to look at Taylor's and Jake's ***qualitative*** assessment packages dealing with their reading of the Jamestown essay. Remember, a ***qualitative*** assessment tool evaluates student depth of knowledge in a particular trait area. On each of these sample tools, you will notice that both Taylor and Jake are asked to demonstrate just one skill of a particular trait. So, when we begin the Teacher Assessment phase, we will be looking at the samples for a depth of demonstrated skill in the their responses. These qualitative assessment tools are different from the quantitative assessment tools we saw in Chapter 2 and very similar to the ones we saw in Chapter 3. Throughout *The Journey of a Reader*, we have attempted to show you a wide variety of assessment tasks and tools that assess both breadth and depth of student ability level. We'll return to the quantitative model in Chapter 5.

In these two samples, we continue our focus in this book on the "reading-to-learn" component of reading theory and pedagogy. The assessment tool we designed for the essay, "Rediscovering Jamestown," is a series of six ***extended-response*** questions, each of which reflects a single skill designated within one of the six traits of an effective reader. In both student samples, we'll follow the model established by Chapters 2 and 3: assessment questions, student responses, and teacher assessment of the responses using the Reading an Informational Text Scoring Guide. Once again, the process used to capture the critical reading skills of these students involved their reading the essay silently to themselves and then writing their answers silently.

Student Work Samples: Taylor, Seventh Grade

Before we administered the assessment, we asked Taylor and all the other students to complete the usual Reading Interest Survey to give us a "picture" of who they were as readers. (A blank Reading Interest Survey form is included in the Appendix.) Taylor's RIS looked like this:

Reading Interest Survey:

Name: Taylor Grade: 7 Teacher: Foster

How many minutes a day do you read: about 30 minutes

Do you read for enjoyment too or just for homework? Usually just homework because I am a slow reader.

Do your parents and other relatives read a lot? No. Maybe the newspaper or tv guide

Do adults at home read out loud to you? Not really.

What are your favorite kinds of books? I like the short stories we are reading in my reading class.

Do you read things other than books? Newspapers, magazines, the internet? Not really.

What are some of your favorite activities? Do you ever read about those activities? Can you give an example?
Movies, shopping, going out with my friends.

What is your favorite subject at school? Reading

Do you like reading in that subject? Yes

What is one goal you have for yourself as a reader in this class? I don't know what you mean.

What is your plan to meet your reading goal? I guess I'll read more.

As your teacher, how can I help you meet your reading goal? Help me when I have questions.

Decoding Conventions

Question: What kind of clues do the subtitles in the essay give you to help you understand the essay better? Use quotes to illustrate your answer.

Taylor's Answer: *That there were new finds that show what life was like for the Jamestown people. I also learned that that Jamestown burned down and that it gave us clues about colonial life.*

Teacher Assessment: Taylor scores a "1" on the trait of decoding conventions. Her response is fairly limited and "does not adequately answer the question," although her general answer implies some knowledge of the use of chapter subtitles when she says "shows what life was like for the Jamestown people." However, overall her response is "sketchy and incomplete," and we are left wondering if Taylor understands the use of subtitles to indicate themes and transitions in informational texts.

Establishing Comprehension

Question: Restate in your own words the "thesis statement" of the essay, and then describe how it is connected to the purpose of the article.

Taylor's Answer: *I think that the essay was about how finding the old fort told us a lot about life back then, and that archeology helped us find that information. And finding out about that guy who got shot in the leg was cool too. It is connected to the purpose because they want us to know how important archeology is.*

Teacher Assessment: Taylor scores a "2" on establishing comprehension. Her response does answer the question in fairly general ways, and it does choose one example to illustrate that "the essay told us a lot about life back then." However, similar to her response to the decoding conventions question, Taylor's response forces us to infer her understanding of the thesis statement as opposed to seeing her understanding in clear, focused language with good examples for support.

Realizing Context

Question: One archeology expert said in the article, "Archeology is like a time machine." Do you have to be an expert to understand the implications of archeology?

Explain what his statement means and use examples from the essay to support your answer.

Taylor's Answer: *Archeology is like a time machine, because everything that you discover tells us about the time it came from. Also, when the author says "we started finding copper, copper, copper, lots of it!" it shows you that they found things they didn't expect.*

Teacher Assessment: Taylor's response to the realizing context question is definitely stronger than either of her other two answers. She scores a "3" in realizing context. She defines the statement she is examining when she says that "everything that you discover tells us about the time it came from." Her response "generally answers the question using some context language to demonstrate a basic level of understanding." Further, she provides an excellent example—"we started finding copper, copper, copper, lots of it"—to support her understanding of archeology as a time machine. Nonetheless, her response is "close to the surface," and the "whole idea of contextual relationships between many factors is still in development."

Developing Interpretation

Question: In the essay, "Rediscovering Jamestown," a sidebar article discusses the "real" story of Pocahontas and Captain John Smith. Using clues and evidence from the sidebar and from your own background knowledge, interpret why Pocahontas became such a famous person in the history of the colonies.

Taylor's Answer: *She is famous because she was the first Native-American who married an Englishman. King James was delighted with her, but she died before she could go back to Virginia. She was kidnapped by the English, but she still liked them.*

Teacher Assessment: Taylor scores a "2" on the trait of developing interpretations. Her response "does not provide enough evidence of interpretation skill to adequately judge whether she understands the concept." Although she does summarize several facts from the text—Pocahontas married an Englishman, King James was delighted with her, she died before returning home, and she was kidnapped by the British—her response does not seem to notice, much less resolve, the ambiguous relationship between these facts and Pocahontas's identity as a strong historical figure. Though she provides examples, there is no analysis to put them into context and explain their importance.

Integrating for Synthesis

Question: Using clues and evidence from the essay, describe a timeline that details the chronology of events that happened between the first Jamestown settlers arriving in 1607 and when the capital was moved to Williamsburg in 1698. Then, using a synthesis of ideas, explain why the Jamestown site has only been recently rediscovered.

Taylor's Answer: *First, the settlers came in 1607, then they built a fort, then it burned down, then they moved to Williamsburg and Jamestown disappeared.*

Teacher Assessment: Taylor scores a "1" in integrating for synthesis. Her response does list a series of chronological events, but they are not explained, nor is any parallel development evident. The response does not integrate sources or understandings at all. Taylor's response is not unusual in an overview of student work. Many other students developed responses similar to Taylor's; the ability to sequence events does not demonstrate the ability to synthesize. To integrate a variety of sources for a synthesis of ideas, students need to develop the skills of analyzing chronological or sequential information and placing it into a context of ideas to illustrate a process of history, to demonstrate a cause-and-effect relationship, or to compare and contrast similar events.

Critiquing for Evaluation

Question: Using clues and evidence from the essay, defend why you think archeology is an important key to rediscovering history. Develop your argument with clear, concrete reasons and use quotes from the essay to defend your evaluation.

Taylor's Answer: *I think that archeology is important because no one would have known that they used copper to trade with the Native Americans unless it had been rediscovered. Also, people think that Pocahontas is not real, but kids need to know that she is a real life person, not just a movie. Also, finding that skeleton was cool because people always want to know about who died.*

Teacher Assessment: Taylor scores a "2" on critiquing for evaluation. Her response is "just beginning to explore a critical stance on an informational text." Although she features three examples—copper, Pocahontas, and the skeleton—none of them is used to develop a critical evaluation. Again, although Taylor's response implies an evaluation of the importance of archeology, her response is "sketchily described and not connected to other ideas or issues."

Overall Teacher Assessment: We now have a picture of Taylor's ability to respond in depth using her critical reading skills in this qualitative assessment. If we show her scores and placements across the range of the traits, they look like this:

	Conventions	*Comprehension*	*Context*	*Interpretation*	*Synthesis*	*Evaluation*
Informational Text Scoring Guide	1	2	3	2	1	2

Taylor is definitely an emerging reader in critical reading ability. Across the range of the traits, her scores indicate that her responses are, for the most part, incomplete and do not directly answer each question. Taylor would benefit from some modeling exercises where sample responses are scored by a whole class or even small groups. Through working with both samples and the indicators of the rubric, Taylor would have the opportunity to take her responses that imply deeper understanding and rework them so they are specific, focused, and explicit.

Student Work Samples: Jake, Seventh Grade

Again, before we administered the assessment, we asked Jake and all the other students to complete a Reading Interest Survey to give us a picture of who they were as readers. (A blank Reading Interest Survey Form is included in the Appendix.) Jake's RIS looked like this:

Reading Interest Survey

Name: Jake Grade: 7 Teacher: Foster

How many minutes a day do you read: 60 minutes

Do you read for enjoyment too or just for homework? For Both.

Do your parents and other relatives read a lot? Yes, my dad and I switch back and forth our Michael Crighton books.

Do adults at home read out loud to you? Not anymore, but they used to when I was a little kid.

What are your favorite kinds of books? Thrillers like Michael Crighton and Stephen King

Do you read things other than books? Newspapers, magazines, the internet? Yes, I am on the internet a lot.

What are some of your favorite activities? Do you ever read about those activities? Can you give an example?
I like to surf the net a lot and see a lot of different web sites. I also hang out with my friends and watch movies.
What is your favorite subject at school? Language Arts, Social Studies, Science

Do you like reading in that subject? Yes, mainly in my Language Arts class.

What is one goal you have for yourself as a reader in this class? I'd like to read some more horror and science fiction. I'd like to also read real-life historical accounts of wars and stuff.

What is your plan to meet your reading goal? I guess search more authors and subjects on the internet and at the bookstore.

As your teacher, how can I help you meet your reading goal? Give me some other search ideas or author names.

We can learn quite a bit about Jake based on his reading interest survey. It appears that he strongly identifies himself as a reader, reading for both pleasure and homework, and he has specific authors and genres that he prefers—Stephen King and Michael Crighton, thrillers and horror. Further, Jake appears to have strong access to technical reading skill through his use of the Internet. Let's take a look at his work sample and assess his qualitative presentation of his critical reading skills.

Decoding Conventions

Question: What kind of clues do the subtitles in the essay give you to help you understand the essay better? Use quotes to illustrate your answer.

Jake's Answer: *The title is "Rediscovering Jamestown." The first subtitle is: "New finds show what life was like for America's first English settlers." This subtitle is the first thing that I notice as I start to read the article. So, although the title alludes to "rediscovering" one of the first British settlements, I learn from the first subtitle that archeology is definitely involved. Then, the next three subtitles, "A city that wasn't built to last," "Dusting off history," and "Clues to colonial life," give me a preview of what that section is going to be about. Each one of them is like a mini-article, although they are all connected to Jamestown and archeology.*

Teacher Assessment: Jake scores a "5" for decoding conventions. His response is thorough, it directly answers the questions, and it even builds beyond the question. His response definitely illustrates the "thinking frame" he establishes for himself as he prepares to read an informational text. His direct usage of the subtitles themselves and his connection of them to their sections demonstrate his knowledge of the organizational framework of conventions. This is a model response.

Establishing Comprehension

Question: Restate in your own words the "thesis statement" of the essay, and then describe how it is connected to the purpose of the article.

Jake's Answer: *I think the thesis statement is: "But new discoveries, including this skeleton, prove that the fort and its clues to colonial life are buried in the soil." If I was to put that in my own words, I think I would say that although the subject of the article is about Jamestown, the article is also about the importance of archeology. Just think, if they hadn't started digging in the new site, all of that stuff would have laid there for a lot longer.*

Teacher Assessment: Jake scores a "4" for the trait of establishing comprehension. His response closely matches the indicators of a "5" in that it "directly answers the question, uses comprehension terms to indicate precise understanding," but the connection between his specific example—digging in the new site—needs to be more strongly connected to his understanding of the thesis statement and the purpose of the article.

Realizing Context

Question: One archeology expert said in the article, "Archeology is like a time machine." Do you have to be an expert to understand the implications of archeology? Explain what his statement means, and use examples from the essay to support your answer.

Jake's Answer: *That is exactly what archeology is all about. When archeologists are uncovering a site, they find things grouped together. For example, in the Jamestown site, they discovered that "settlers seemed to have tossed garbage, including fish bones and waste iron, into deep pits like this one at the fort site." I think this is neat, because the archeologists were able to put the information together by both finding the stuff and figuring out that it was garbage. I am not an expert and I understand it.*

Teacher Assessment: Jake scores a "4" on realizing context. His response is solid and thoughtful. His response also builds beyond the scope of the question when he says that "archeologists are able to put the information together by both finding the stuff and figuring out that it was garbage." His response just falls short of a "5" in that he does not build on the second part of the question that links expertise and inference.

Developing Interpretation

Question: In the essay, "Rediscovering Jamestown," a sidebar article discusses the "real" story of Pocahontas and Captain John Smith. Using clues and evidence from the sidebar and from your own background knowledge, interpret why Pocahontas became such a famous person in the history of the colonies.

Jake's Answer: *Pocahontas is a famous figure in American history. I think that why she is famous is because of John Smith saying that she saved his life. In reality they kidnapped her and took her to England. In the article it says that she met and married her "true love, John Rolf." How do they know that? If she was kidnapped, then how could she fall in love with one of her captors? I think I would like more information before I would accept that statement. I think that she was so famous because, if she did save John Smith's life, then she did something that was unusual for women back then. Plus, only men and boys came to Jamestown on the first trip, so there were no other women there.*

Teacher Assessment: Jake scores a "5" on developing interpretations. His response is a marvelous example of "interpreting to analyze and think critically about an informational text." Jake is not afraid to contend with some issues he finds ambiguous in the text—Pocahontas's true love, John Rolf—and he also "engages the bigger picture" of women's roles and rights in early colonial society. His response moves beyond the question to address historical and cultural issues.

Integrating for Synthesis

Question: Using clues and evidence from the essay, describe a timeline that details the chronology of events that happened between the first Jamestown settlers arriving in 1607 and when the capital was moved to Williamsburg in 1698. Then, using a synthesis of ideas, explain why the Jamestown site has only been recently rediscovered.

Jake's Answer: *(1) In May, 1607, a ship arrived to the new colonies carrying 104 men and boys; (2) In 1608, a fire ravaged what was left of the settlers who were not killed by disease, starvation, or the Powhatan; (3) In 1698, another fire destroyed the first and second Jamestown* *site, and they decided to move the capital to Williamsburg. I think that when you add all of these facts up together, they tell the story of the first settlement where a lot of bad things happened: two fires, disease, starvation, fights with the Indians, etc. So, when you look at why they moved the capital to Williamsburg, it makes you realize that other settlements came, and they were probably better planned and organized than the Jamestown men. That makes sense, then as to why it was hard to locate the original site. There probably wasn't as much paperwork and information as there was on other sites that came later. The Jamestown people weren't as aware that they were "making history."*

Teacher Assessment: What a wonderful response! Jake's thinking is clear and organized, and his connections are well-made. His synthesis between the facts and his analysis of the issues and events is right on and strongly argued. He "integrates textual material and other types of knowledge and uses decision-making skills to create a synthesis of ideas." He also creates a well-documented parallel development in that his analysis "concretely performs the synthesis application directed by the question." Jake definitely scores a "5" on integrating for synthesis.

Critiquing for Evaluation

Question: Using clues and evidence from the essay, defend why you think archeology is an important key to rediscovering history. Develop your argument with clear, concrete reasons and use quotes from the essay to defend your evaluation.

Jake's Answer: *I think it is obvious why archeology is important to rediscovering history. Without archeology, we would not know where the correct site of the original Jamestown actually was. We wouldn't have any of the things—180,000 items—that we have, and we especially would not have the skeleton with the shot leg. Sometimes what it says in history books, like John Smith saying that Pocahontas saved him, cannot be argued because no one knows what really happened. But, with archeology we do know, because we have the facts—the artifacts.*

Teacher Assessment: Jake scores a "4" on critiquing for evaluation. His response is thoughtful and impassioned and demonstrates his strong conviction of the importance of archeology. However, Jake's response does not cite direct quotes to support his opinions, and without those quotes his response is not as strong as it could be. It does "critically engage the world" and it does "evaluate to assert a strong voice in the textual relationship," but his lack of direct quotes keeps this response from being a "5."

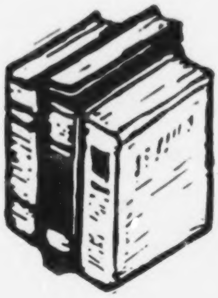
Overall Teacher Assessment: We now have a picture of Jake's ability to respond in depth using his critical reading skills in this qualitative assessment. If we show his scores and placements across the range of the traits, they look like this:

	Conventions	*Comprehension*	*Context*	*Interpretation*	*Synthesis*	*Evaluation*
Informational Text Scoring Guide	5	4	4	5	5	4

Jake is an amazing reader! His ability to critically read material, create a thinking frame, comprehend it purposefully, acknowledge the contexts from which it comes, interpret it masterfully beyond the borders of the article, synthesize the information, and critique with a thoughtful voice demonstrates a reader who reads the lines, reads between the lines, and reads beyond the lines. Many of his responses could be used as "models" to demonstrate what a successful response looks like. For Jake's purposes, though, there is even a little room for improvement at the top. Upon examination of the scoring guides, even Jake could see places where he could expand on his responses, tighten up the examples, and strengthen the analysis.

Lesson Plans for Each of the Traits of an Effective Reader

Next in this chapter, we've created six assessment opportunities—one for each trait—for you to use in your middle-school classroom. We've described how each "task" or "tool" fits within the ongoing or cumulative category, the qualitative or quantitative category, and, of course, we've described how to offer your students plenty of voice and choice.



DECODING CONVENTIONS: Charting Conventions

Assessment type: ***tool***
Type of task or tool: ***cumulative; qualitative or quantitative***
Voice: ***high; individual participation***
Choice: ***moderate; selection of details***
Skill focus: ***components of conventions***
Selected text: ***grade- level appropriate; Alice Walker's poem, "The Democratic Order: Things in Twenty Years I Understood," works well.***
Suggested age group: ***middle school***
Time required: ***30-40 minutes***

Description:

In this assessment tool, the facilitator selects a passage—a poem, a paragraph, a scene of a play—that demonstrates a variety of reading conventions through the use of punctuation devices, organizational indicators, and genre and mode forms. Students read the passage out loud together or silently to themselves and then answer a series of questions designed to assess student ability in decoding words, symbols, text features, organization, and genre. The particular poem by Alice Walker we've selected is a wonderful example.

Materials/Preparation:

1) A copy of Alice Walker's poem, "The Democratic Order: Such Things in Twenty Years I Understood." You can find it in her book of poetry entitled, *Once: Poems.*
2) Chart-pack paper with the poem written on it.
3) A handout that asks four sample questions concerning conventions
4) Introduce the trait of decoding conventions, and model for your students where and how to find conventions at work in texts.

What to Do:

1) Either read the poem together as a class or select a student to read the poem aloud.
2) Have a general discussion to elicit questions or comments to make sure that a basic comprehension of the poem is established.
3) In written form, ask the students to answer these five questions: (1) What genre is this text and how do you know? (2) Why are there parentheses around the words "back blistered"? (3) Why are there quotation marks around the word "fuss"? (4)

Why is there a colon in the title? (5) How does the title reflect the hidden message of the poem?

4) Go over each question with your students. "Chart" the variety of their responses.
5) Analyze, as a class, the kind of impact that textual conventions have on the meaning of a text.

Desired Outcomes:

- Students learn to apply knowledge of conventions in comprehending texts
- Students see the connections between meaning and text structure
- Students develop deeper "thinking frames"

ESTABLISHING COMPREHENSION: Story Map

Assessment type: ***task***
Type of task or tool: ***ongoing; quantitative***
Voice: ***high; individual participation***
Choice: ***moderate; selection of details***
Skill focus: ***components of comprehension***
Selected text: ***grade-level appropriate***
Suggested age group: ***middle school***
Time required: ***30-40 minutes***

Description:

In creating a "story map" of a text just read, students are asked to diagram pictorially their understanding of a text. This story map should identify major characters, turning moments, and resolution. With middle schoolers, readers can also demonstrate connections between significant and supporting events and details. This activity can be conducted in a one-on-one conference, with a large group of students, or even as a silent activity for individual students.

Materials/Preparation:

1) Chart-pack paper or overhead.
2) Selected text.
3) Introduce students to the concept of a graphic organizer.
4) Model one story map of a familiar fairy tale, such as "The Three Little Pigs" or another favorite.

What to Do:

1) Choose your text. Often, to illustrate this activity the first time, it works well to select an outside text rather than one that you are already working on.
2) Have your students read the text silently.
3) First, create a chart list of possible major characters, minor characters, turning moments, and resolutions.
4) Then, create a graphic organizer with a predetermined number of "bubbles."
5) Using your class, have the students decide how to graph the story. Use voting and other techniques to resolve differences between decisions for characters, turning moments, and resolutions.

6) After "mapping" your story, discuss the process of problem solving and resolving differences in opinions.

Desired Outcomes:

- Students demonstrate purposeful comprehension skills
- Students learn graphing techniques for mapping stories or texts
- Students demonstrate problem-solving capacity with their peers
- Students are able to articulate comprehension decisions and realizations

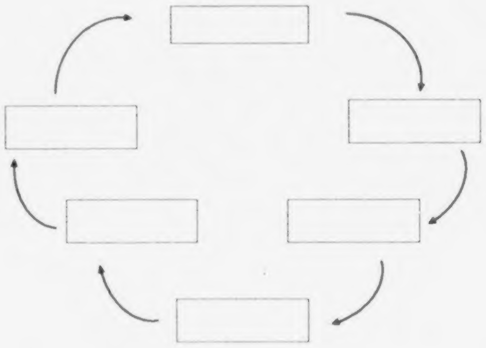
REALIZING CONTEXT: Vocabulary-Linking Exercise

Assessment type: *task or tool*
Type of task or tool: *cumulative or ongoing; qualitative*
Voice: *high; individual participation*
Choice: *moderate; selection of details*
Skill focus: *components of context*
Selected text: *grade level appropriate; textbooks work well*
Suggested age group: *middle school*
Time required: *30-40 minutes*

Description:

In this assessment task, students are assessed either as a large group (ongoing task) or singly (cumulative tool) in their critical reading ability to link terminology with events—chronological or sequential—in a specific subject matter. This task assesses each of the skills of realizing context.

Vocabulary Link



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Materials/Preparation:

1) Recreate the link illustrated to the right.
2) Prepare students by discussing the skills of realizing context.
3) Work through a sample vocabulary link to demonstrate how to complete one.

What to Do:

1) Choose a short text—usually a section of a chapter that features its own subtitle is a good choice.
2) Put a selected term—for example, the term "Emancipation Proclamation" from an eighth-grade history textbook works well—in the top box under the title, "Vocabulary Link." Ask the students to search their textbooks and select ways to link sequential or chronological events to explain and "contextualize" the vocabulary word. Possible links with the term "Emancipation Proclamation" include the following: (a) it was a strategy of war, not a human rights issue; (b) Lincoln waited for

a Union victory before announcing it in order to ensure support; (c) it functioned as a "shot across the bow" to move the South to surrender.

3) Ask your students to draw upon their knowledge, both explicit and inferential, to illustrate each step in the vocabulary-linking exercise.
4) Provide several samples of student work to analyze as a class. Feature two versions of the same word and a variety of different words.

Desired Outcomes:

- Students realize the many layers of contextual evidence in texts.
- Students practice expanding definitions of vocabulary terminology to include concepts that develop sequentially.
- Students integrate concept and subject knowledge with themes.

DEVELOPING INTERPRETATIONS: Problems-Clues-Interpretation Chart

Assessment type: *tool*
Type of task or tool: *cumulative or ongoing; qualitative*
Voice: *high; individual participation*
Choice: *moderate; selection of details*
Skill focus: *components of interpretation*
Selected text: *grade- level appropriate*
Suggested age group: *middle school*
Time required: *30-40 minutes*

Description:

In this assessment task, students are asked to fill in each column of this graphic to explain how they have identified textual problems, discovered clues that address those problems, and then linked both to a strong interpretive statement based on defensible use of quotes and knowledge.

Problems-Clues-Interpretation Chart

What are the problems, gaps, or ambiguities I notice in this text?	**What are the clues I have located that address the problem I have identified?**	**What interpretations can I make based on the relationship between the problems and its clues and evidence?**

Materials/Preparation:

1) Prepare a sample Problems-Clues-Interpretation Chart as illustrated above.
2) Model with a text or a piece of visual text—art—how to develop the three-step process listed above.
3) Explain to the students the validity of defensible interpretations using good clues and evidence.

What to Do:

1) Choose a sample text. Often, with a new assessment task, it works well to choose a text not already in use.
2) Put several "problems" on the overhead or the board.
3) Have students work individually or in small groups to gather clues and evidence to put in their middle column.
4) Have students work together to provide their statements of interpretation with well-placed use of quotes.
5) Analyze the interpretations and pose the idea of revising interpretations based on new evidence. How would their interpretations change?

Desired Outcomes:

- Students see the developmental process of creating well-defended interpretations
- Students demonstrate problem-solving abilities
- Students learn to search for and identify clues and evidence from texts
- Students revise and deepen interpretations based on collaborative learning

INTEGRATING FOR SYNTHESIS: Venn Diagram

Assessment type: *tool or task*
Type of task or tool: *cumulative or ongoing; qualitative*
Voice: *high; individual participation*
Choice: *moderate; selection of details*
Skill focus: *components of integrating for sdynthesis*
Selected text: *grade-level appropriate*
Suggested age group: *middle school*
Time required: *30-40 minutes*

Description:

In this traditional reading activity, students read two stories that have common themes and ideas. Then, by using two interlocking circles, students brainstorm the similarities in theme, content, characters, and details. The similarities go in the middle of the two interlocking circles where the circles overlap. The differences then go in the unshared space occupied by each circle. Interesting dialogue ensues through the collaborative thinking and working of student readers as they "visually" synthesize, compare, and contrast texts.

Materials/Preparation:

1) Choose two texts that have obvious similarities. Two fairy tales or a modern and a traditional fairy tale often work well as a sample "model."
2) Create your interlocking circles either on the overhead or the blackboard.
3) Prepare your students for the thinking behind a Venn Diagram.

What to Do:

1) Have the students read the two texts.
2) Have the students begin brainstorming in small groups.
3) What are the similarities between the two stories? What are the differences? Where do the distinctions begin to take place? How does a modern fairy tale turn a traditional tale around?
4) Begin filling in the circles on the Venn Diagram.
5) After exhausting all the possibilities, analyze the information.
6) What were some of the more unusual pairings?
7) What were some themes or conclusions that emerged from the discussion?

Desired Outcomes:

- Students see visual depictions of similarities and differences
- Students synthesize multiple sources in order to draw conclusions
- Students see details, characters, themes, and ideas separately and as parts of a whole

CRITIQUING FOR EVALUATION: *Dear Author Letters*

Assessment type: *tool*
Type of task or tool: *cumulative; qualitative*
Voice: *high; individual participation*
Choice: *high; selection of topics*
Skill focus: *components of critiquing for evaluation*
Selected text: *grade-level appropriate*
Suggested age group: *middle school*
Time required: *30-40 minutes*

Description:

This activity is a "writing in response to reading" activity. It allows for individual performance within required criteria in the form of a letter. Each student writes a **Dear Author Letter** to a favorite author and selects specific evaluation criteria to address in the scope of the letter. They select one issue for discussion and challenge the author with a thoughtful critique of the text's work on the issue. The letter functions as a wonderful self-assessment model in which authentic performance is foremost in the student experience.

Materials/Preparation:

1) Select several sample **Dear Author Letters** to share with your students.
2) Write a **Dear Author Letter** of your own addressing a specific issue.
3) Have the scoring guide for the trait of evaluation available in student-friendly language to assist in self-assessment.

What to Do:

1) Share several student versions of **Dear Author Letters**.
2) Have students brainstorm what was effective and what needed improvement in each letter.
3) Present the criteria for your class's **Dear Author Letter**.
4) Talk about the criteria and connect the student samples.
5) Share your own **Dear Author Letter**. Self-assess it; talk about points for revision, using cues from your students for assistance.
6) Have your students choose an author.

7) Have them brainstorm possible issues and topics for their own letters.
8) Have them draft a letter.
9) Have them share their letters with a partner.
10) Have them revise letters based on student partner advice.
11) Collect the **Dear Author Letters** with an attached self-assessment guide that reflects a score from the rubric and articulates why the score represents the letter.

Desired Outcomes:

- Students evaluate and critique using a model that honors authenticity.
- Students take a reading response model through brainstorming, drafting, revising, and completing a process.
- Students contend with and arrive at an understanding of the components of critical evaluation.

Suggested Titles for Read Aloud and Read Alone

Judy Blume. *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing.* Dutton, 1972: Dell, 1986.

Roald Dahl. *James and the Giant Peach.* Illustrated by Nancy Ekholm Burket. Knopf, 1961; Penguin, 1988.

Jean Fritz. *What's the Big Idea, Ben Franklin?* Putnam, 1982.

Deborah and James Howe. Bunnicula: *A Rabbit Tale of Mystery.* Antheneum, 1979; Avon, 1980.

J. Kennedy and Dorothy Kennedy. *Knock at a Star; A Child's Introduction to Poetry.* Illustrated by Karen Weinhaus. Little, Brown, 1983.

Patricia MacLachlan. *Sarah, Plain and Tall.* Harper, 1985, 1987.

End Notes

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[1] Bomer, Randy. *Time for Meaning: Crafting Literate Lives in Middle and High School.* Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heineman, 1995, p.97.

[2] Billmeyer, Rachel. *Teaching Reading in the Content Area: If Not Me, Then Who?* Aurora, Colorado: Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory, 1996, p.1.

[3] As cited in Rachel Billmeyer, p. 243.

Chapter Five

High School and Beyond: Reading for School-to-Work and Higher Education

> When I read a text, the text means something because it connects to what I've encountered in the past and in subtle, sometimes invisible ways, modifies what I've known before. While I'm changing my mind as I read, I'm doing so in anticipation of new experiences still to come. I'm getting an answer ready for my life. Then the next time I read and make connections similar to those, they'll be a little richer and more complicated for my having read what I had before. The experience of meaning is always one in which past, present and future are brought together . . . . The difference lies, in part, where past knowledge is assumed to come from and where the fruits of reading are bound in the future. For me, as a reader and as a teacher, the source and destination of a reading experience is a whole lifetime, not just school, the engine is the learner's purpose, not a performance for authority.[1]

The Extended Response Assessment Model

As high school students prepare for life—and reading—beyond the four walls of the classroom, their reading experience will extend far beyond the boundaries of the text. An assessment model that prepares them for this extension of learning is the extended response or, as it was known ten years ago, the essay exam. The extended response is now one of the most frequently used tools for assessing students' critical reading ability as they leave high school. An extended response is an assessment mechanism designed to reveal students' indepth knowledge of a particular subject, their organizational ability to process that subject, and their problem-solving capacity to synthesize multiple sources to create a thoughtful response to a specific question.

Remember the equation, "Simple student outcome, simple assessment mechanism; complex student outcome, complex assessment mechanism"? Extended responses can take the form of a few short sentences of explanation, or they can involve a complex essay in which quotations, sources, and a strong understanding of organizational features are necessary.

Districts and states often require students to produce extended responses to subject matter in several content areas, in order to assess their level of competency in regard to state benchmarks for specific grade levels. Some states require extended responses in order to determine students' proficiency for graduation. Some colleges and universities offer extended response assessments to students who wish to test out of freshman-level classes. Teachers use extended responses to assess students' cumulative knowledge of a chapter, a unit, a quarter, or even a semester's worth of study.

In this chapter, "intervention strategies" for both teaching and assessing the quality of extended responses will be demonstrated. By giving our students thoughtful "framing" materials for understanding the requirements of the extended response and creating a quality response, students will be able to demonstrate genuine performance of their achievement as readers.

The Framework for the Successful Extended Response: Things That Students Should Know and be Able to Do

- I know the vocabulary—"prompt language"—of extended responses
- I am able to determine the specific requirements of an extended response question
- I write strong controlling ideas that determine the framework of my response
- I organize my ideas within the guidelines the prompt language has given me
- I develop my ideas with specific detail and use quotes when required
- I conclude my response to the question with a sense of finality
- I have a strategy for writing extended responses within a time limit

Prompt Language

This is a list of some of the most commonly used "prompt language terms" in extended response questions. Let's look them over with their accompanying definitions. When students learn the definitions of particular prompt terms, they can better organize their thinking and focus their responses.

ANALYZE

To ANALYZE means to break down into parts or principles in order to understand the whole. It means to take apart in such a way that a complete understanding of the whole can be acquired by a consideration of its components.

COMPARE/CONTRAST

To COMPARE means to bring out both similarities and differences, with the emphasis on similarities. To CONTRAST is to stress the differences. Both of these terms lend themselves to either the flip-flop or block methods of organization.

CRITICIZE

CRITICIZE means to point out the good and the bad points, not just the bad as many people think. It means to judge both the merits and the faults.

DEFINE

To DEFINE is to give a clear, concise meaning for a term. Generally, a DEFINE question is answered by identifying the class to which the term belongs, and then explaining how it differs from other items in that class.

DESCRIBE

DESCRIBE means to give a word picture of something, to tell a story in detail. The word DESCRIBE directs the answer of the question to be organized either spatially or chronologically.

DIAGRAM

To DIAGRAM means to organize in a graphic way—to chart, draw, sketch, or outline. A good diagram will label all parts of a figure appropriately.

DISCUSS

DISCUSS usually requires a long and complete response to the specific question. DISCUSS means to talk or write about an issue from all angles. It lends itself to "dumping the whole load." Because of the scope of an answer to a DISCUSS question, careful thought must be given to its organization.

EVALUATE

Similar to CRITICIZE, to EVALUATE means to give a judgment of value, including positive and negative factors. It means to assess, to show the worth or lack of worth of something.

EXPLAIN

EXPLAIN means to make plain, to clarify, to analyze, and to account for. An EXPLAIN question calls for cause-and-effect evaluation. The answer can best be presented in step-by-step organization.

HOW

A HOW question directs you to provide an answer which considers causality, manner, extent, or condition.

IDENTIFY

To IDENTIFY means to name, to make known, to bring out.

ILLUSTRATE

To ILLUSRATE means to show by means of a picture, chart, diagram (see above), or some other visual presentation. Used more loosely, ILLUSTRATE can simply mean to give an example of.

INTERPRET

To INTERPRET means to clarify, elucidate, expound, or explain the significance of. It also means to translate the meaning of. It is often used with famous quotations.

JUSTIFY

To JUSTIFY means to show what is right, positive, valid, proper, and reasonable. The writer must stress the advantages of a position over the disadvantages.

LIST and ENUMERATE

LIST and ENUMERATE can be interchanged. They mean to itemize, to catalogue. A LIST question calls for a systematic listing, for example, numbers or letters. An ENUMERATE question is less formal. It only requires a random listing.

OUTLINE

To OUTLINE means to organize a set of ideas into main divisions and subordinate divisions. A somewhat formal system is generally employed.

PROVE

Similar to JUSTIFY, PROVE means give evidence, present facts, argue so as to convince. It means to establish the truth or validity of something.

RELATE

To RELATE means to show the connection or logical association between two or more things through their similarities, such as their origins, functions, results, or traits. RELATE also means to narrate or tell a story. The answer to this second type of RELATE question would be developed chronologically, including a beginning, a middle, and an ending.

REVIEW

To REVIEW means to re-examine key ideas or facts, to survey. REVIEW and SUMMARIZE are similar in meaning. The answer to a question of either type should be developed chronologically.

STATE

STATE means to declare or say simply and briefly. This term suggests a shorter answer than one provided in response to DISCUSS or EXPLAIN directions.

SUMMARIZE

SUMMARIZE means to give the main points in condensed form with the small details left out. SUMMARIZE suggests a step-by-step or chronological development.

TRACE

To TRACE means to ascertain the stages in the progress or development of something. A TRACE question calls for an answer developed chronologically in a step-by-step sequence.

WHAT

A WHAT question directs you to name, to make a statement of amount or extent, or to cite evidence to prove a point. The special meaning of WHAT depends on the actual content of the essay question.

WHY

A WHY question directs you to supply cause, reason, intention, or justification in your answer.

Determine the Specific Requirements of an Extended Response Question

There are three facets to determining the specific requirements of an extended response question: the definition of the "prompt" term; the key word or words in the prompt; and the "boundaries" inside which the response must be confined. Let's look at two examples to see the differences.

Sample Prompt #1

Prompt: DISCUSS the differences between Gene's and Finny's personalities, academic abilities, and internal conflicts in John Knowles' A Separate Peace.

Definition of Prompt Term: To discuss means to write or talk from all angles.
Key Word in Prompt: The key word in this prompt is "differences."
Boundaries to stay inside in the response: I must stick to the topics of personalities, academic abilities, and internal conflicts.

Sample Prompt #2

Prompt: STATE the differences between Gene's and Finny's personalities, academic abilities, and internal conflicts in John Knowles' A Separate Peace.

Definition of Prompt Term: State means to declare briefly or say.
Key Word in Prompt: The key term in this prompt is "differences."
Boundaries to stay inside the response: I must stick to the topics of personalities, academic abilities, and internal conflicts.

What is the difference between these two prompts? They look very similar on the surface. However, when we focus on the difference between "discuss" and "state," we discover a huge difference in expectations for the complexity of the student response.

To state means to "state briefly or say," while to discuss means to "write or talk about from all angles." In the "state" question, the student would pull very literal differences out of the text and provide little to no analysis of why those particular differences were chosen. However, in the "discuss" question, students would be expected to provide a much more complex and cohesive response that looked not only at the differences between the characters on many levels, but also at the implications of those differences.

Develop Strong Controlling Ideas That Determine the Framework of an Extended Response

It's easy! Use the three-part process of definition, key term, and boundary to help your students write a terrific controlling idea. Take each of the three parts and combine them into a statement of purpose for the first sentence of an extended response. Avoid using "I" and use strong, compelling word choice in the opening statement.

Examples:

Controlling Idea #1 (DISCUSS)

Key differences in the personalities, academic abilities, and internal conflicts of Gene and Finny in the novel *A Separate Peace* account for the very different choices they make.

Controlling Idea #2 (STATE)

Personal, academic, and emotional differences distinguish Gene and Finny in *A Separate Peace.*

Your turn…Turn each of these prompts into a controlling idea:

1. *Of what significance is the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls to an understanding of the Hebrew religion?*
2. *How and why have alienated youth turned their backs on the values of the older generation?*
3. *Explain the responsibilities stockholders have in managing the business of a corporation.*

Organize Ideas With the Guidelines the Prompt Language Provides

Don't panic! Aim for a "bull's eye hit" instead of a "shotgun blast." Think of ways to help students "frame" their responses in a well-plotted organization. Here are some examples:

Order of Importance Frame

Structure your response so that you:

1. State your controlling idea.
2. Present your most compelling evidence through to your least compelling evidence OR your least compelling to your most compelling evidence.
3. Transition words you may choose to use include *also, another, again, furthermore, in addition, the least, of primary importance, the most important, the greatest.*

Chronological Development Frame

Structure your response so that you:

1. State your controlling idea.
2. Move from a beginning of a series of ideas.
3. Move into a middle series of ideas.
4. And finally, end with a conclusion of ideas.
5. Transition words you may choose to use include *once, now, then, soon, while, later, suddenly, finally.*

Process Development Frame

Structure your response so that you:

1. State your controlling idea.
2. Develop your process step by step.
3. Transition words you may want to use include *first, second, third, furthermore, thus, next, in addition, gradually, finally.*

Spatial Development Frame

Structure your response so that you:

1. State your controlling idea.
2. Move from left to right, OR move from right to left, OR move from foreground to background, OR move from background to foreground.
3. Transition words you may want to use include *underneath, above, between, below, farther, across, near, opposite, left, right, behind, next to.*

Comparison/Contrast Development Frame

Structure your response so that you:

1. State your controlling idea.
2. Develop Topics A and B in alternating paragraphs (block method) OR move back and forth between topics (flip-flop method).
3. Transition words you may want to use include *similarly, likewise, in the same manner, for example, moreover, although, in spite of, however, nevertheless, on the other hand, yet.*

Develop Ideas With Specific Detail and Use Quotes When Required

Go back to the three-part process: definition, key word, and boundary. Use these "guideposts" to direct students to the facts, details, statistics, quotes, and sources which will help them develop specific, focused, concrete responses. Assign a number to each of the three words—"1" to definition, "2" to key term, and "3" to boundary. Go back through the essay and number the points that jump out from the text. Where students see information that helps them define the prompt term, call it a 1. Where they see definitions, examples, and identification of the key term, call it a 2. Where they see examples of the boundaries they must remain inside to write clear, cohesive responses, call it a 3. When they begin to write their responses, the number labels will help them use their specific details effectively.

Conclude Extended Responses With a Sense of Finality

Conclusions are the last impression a writer/reader/problemsolver leaves in the mind of the assessor. Help students indicate that they have completed their organizational frame. Demonstrate how to use transition words to signal their conclusions. Assist them in providing a brief summary of the major points they have hit in their responses. Model for students how to end with strong, memorable language, a specific detail, or a compelling fact.

Have a Strategy for Writing Extended Responses Within a Time Limit

1. Read the directions nd the essay carefully.
2. Read the directions and the essay again, skimming if time is short.
3. Know the exact definition of the prompt term. If you don't know it, ask or look it up in a dictionary.
4. Pick out the key term from the prompt that structures your response.
5. Determine the boundaries you must stay within when you create your response.
6. Jot down ideas, numbering the details, facts, and statistics in order to have them handy and organized when you write.
7. Write your controlling idea.
8. Determine your method of organization.
9. Develop the body of your response, using an organizational frame.
10. Be as specific and concrete as possible. Refer to the numbers you have given to your details.
11. Use transitions to signal both your organizational frame and your development of ideas.
12. End your response with a sense of finality.
13. Allow time to proofread, check spelling, and fill in any gaps.
14. Pat yourself on the back! Well done!

Last of All: Self-Assessment Sheet for Student Extended Responses

1. Rewrite your controlling idea. Is it effective? Thoughtful? Strongly worded? Why or why not?
2. Is there an introductory paragraph that describes the boundaries of the subject matter and the organizational framework? Please identify the boundaries and the framework.

3. Did you answer the question clearly? How? Defend your answer.

Now let's turn to two student samples. Ryan and Susanna are high school students from Boise, Idaho. We're going to look at Ryan's and Susanna's ***quantitative*** assessment package dealing with a literary essay entitled "Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self" by Alice Walker. Remember, a ***quantitative*** assessment tool is designed to evaluate student breadth of knowledge in a particular trait area. On each of these sample tools, or *short answer assessment models*, you will notice that both Ryan and Susanna are asked to demonstrate a range of skills in a particular trait. So, when we begin the Teacher Assessment phase, we will be looking at the samples for a breadth of demonstrated skill in the their responses. These quantitative assessment tools are different from the qualitative assessment tools we saw in Chapter 3 and 4 and very similar to the ones we saw in Chapter 2. Throughout *The Journey of a Reader*, we have attempted to show you a wide variety of assessment tasks and tools that assess both breadth and depth of student ability level.

The essay "Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self" can be found in the Appendix. In these two samples, we continue the book's focus on the "reading-to-learn" component of reading theory and pedagogy. The assessment tool we designed for the essay, "Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self," is composed of several short-answer questions that reflect several skills designated within one of the six traits of an effective reader. In both student samples, we'll follow the model established by Chapters 2 and 3: first, the assessment questions; second, the student responses; and last, the teacher assessment of the responses using the Reading a Literary Text Scoring Guide. The process used to capture the critical reading skills of these students involved their reading the literary essay silently to themselves and then writing their answers silently.

Student Work Samples: Ryan, Ninth Grade

Before we administered the assessment, we asked Ryan and all the other students to complete a Reading Interest Survey to give us a picture of who they were as readers. (A blank Reading Interest Survey Form is included in the Appendix.) Ryan's RIS looked like this:

Reading Interest Survey

Name: *Ryan* **Grade:** *9* **Teacher:** *Bella*

How many minutes a day do you read? *60*

Do you read for enjoyment for just for homework: *Both mostly enjoyment*

Do your parents and other relatives read a lot? *Yes*

What are your favorite kinds of books? *Stories about things that could possibly happen even if they are sort of fantasy.*

Do you read things other than books? For instance, do you read the newspaper or magazines *Yes*

What are some of your favorite activities? *Reading, writing fiction*

Do you ever read about those activities: *Yes*

What is the best book you ever read and why: *Jurassic Park. The movie wasn't as good as the book.*

What is your favorite subject at school: *English*

Do you like to read in that subject? Like what? *All the books.*

What is one goal you have for yourself as a reader in this class? *Read more Crichton books, maybe some Dean Koontz too.*

What is your plan to meet your reading goal? *Get suggestions for good authors*

As your teacher, how can I help you meet your reading goal? *Help me with authors' names.*

Teacher Assessment: We can tell quite a bit about Ryan as a reader from his Reading Interest Survey. He definitely sees himself as a reader, focusing on pop-culture literature and comparing it critically with movie adaptations. Ryan's answers seem a bit terse. It will be interesting to see if his short answers to the assessment questions "hold back," as well. He has strong goals in seeking out similar science fiction or fantasy-type novels, and clearly, English is his favorite subject, as he states. Lastly, though, Ryan appears to hold his reading interest "apart" from critical expression. The Reading a

Literary Text Scoring Guide may be an important tool to enable Ryan to focus closely on the quality of his response as he attempts to meet his state's reading standards.

Decoding Conventions

Instructions: Please write the most appropriate answer to each of the following questions concerning conventions and Alice Walker's essay, "Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self."

Question: "Beauty" is a special essay written by an author describing events from her growing-up years. What kind of genre is this personal essay? Are there other types of genre within the essay? What are they?

Ryan's Answer: *Autobiography, poetry, dialogue (people talking to each other) and monologue (Walker talking to herself).*

Question: In writing a personal essay, what is the point of view (first-person, second-person, or third-person) Walker uses? How do you know? Does she ever change point of view? Why?

Ryan's Answer: *First-person and dialogue (second-person?). She changes back and forth to show us that there were lots of perspectives.*

Question: Find and quote Walker's thesis statement for her essay and then explain why you chose that sentence.

Ryan's Answer: *"It's great fun being cute, but then one day it ended."*

Question: Look at this sentence: *"Did I imagine the anguish of never looking up?"* Why did Walker italicize this statement?

Ryan's Answer: *She is speaking right into our heads as if she is talking only to us.*

Question: Who is speaking and why does this passage sound different from the rest of the essay: "That night, as I do almost every night, I abuse my eye. I rant and rave about it, in front of the mirror. I plead with it to clear up before morning. I tell it I hate it and despise it. I do not pray for sight. I pray for beauty." "You did not change, they say."

Ryan's Answer: *Walker is talking and showing us how horrible it was.*

Teacher Assessment: Ryan scores a "2" in decoding conventions. If we look at the *range* of performance using the scoring guide, his responses collectively answer the bare requirements of the questions. However, his examples are only generally cited, and he does not use text structure language with much enthusiasm or confidence. He appears to understand "point of view" and "interior monologue" in that he responds to Walker's italicized comments by saying, "she is talking right into our heads," but he definitely doesn't expand any of his answers.

Establishing Comprehension

Instructions: Please answer the following questions using your best thinking and reading skills. Refer to the essay "Beauty" as often as you like to check your answers and look for clues to make your explanations clear.

Question: Make a prediction about other Alice Walker writings that are about her childhood. What do you think they might be about?

Ryan's Answer: *She probably writes about self-esteem, being disabled, seeing all things.*

Question: Who are the major and minor characters in this essay? How did you decide which were major and which were minor?

Ryan's Answer: *Walker is major and her daughter is major and all the others are minor.*

Question: Look at this list of details and put "SI" next to the significant details that are key to describing the characters of Alice Walker. Put "SU" next to the details that are supporting details used to give us a fuller picture but are not as important as the significant details. Then, provide analysis why there is a difference between significant and supporting details.

Ryan's Answer:

(SU) "Take me, Daddy, I'm the prettiest!"
(SI) For six years I do not stare at anyone because I do not raise my head.

(SI) I do not pray for sight. I pray for beauty.
(SI) There was a world in my eye.

Question: Write a one- to two-sentence summary of the main conflict of the essay.

Ryan's Answer: *People are scared of differences and they shouldn't be.*

Question: How is the essay resolved?

Ryan's Answer: *Alice Walker shows that people shouldn't feel sorry for themselves.*

Teacher Assessment: Ryan's performance on this set of short answers follows the pattern established by the decoding conventions short-answer assessment we saw earlier. His brief answers, although generally correct, stay within safe parameters. On this, the establishing comprehension trait, Ryan again scores a "2" using the Reading a Literary Text Scoring Guide. In fact, on several of the questions, Ryan states the basic information, "Walker is major, her daughter is major, and all the others are minor," but provides no analysis for his distinction between characters. He is able to use basic comprehension terms, but he does not establish "ownership" of the terms by using them in powerful, critical ways. In the series of questions between significant and supporting details, Ryan gets the list correct, yet he chooses not to provide analysis to back up his selections.

Realizing Context

Instructions: Please answer each of the questions to your best ability. Each of the questions may have many possible "right " answers; your job is to do your best to explain why you chose the answer you did. Refer to Walker's essay as often as you need to check your answers, and use details and clues for information.

Question: Please write some of the vocabulary words that you feel "belong" to this essay. Then, describe why you chose those terms.

Ryan's Answer: *sight, pretty, world in your eye. I chose them because they connect to the story's message.*

Question: Please describe in your words what Alice Walker's childhood was like.

Ryan's Answer: *She was ignored by her parents after her eye injury. They didn't care how upset she was. She was very self-conscious until her brother helped her get the "blob" removed.*

Question: What is Alice Walker's tone in the essay? Please quote a sentence from the essay that represents the tone you have described.

Ryan's Answer: *She is angry a lot, but happy too by the end. The sentence I picked is: "Did I imagine not looking up?"*

Question: What is Alice Walker's purpose in writing this essay, "Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self?

Ryan's Answer: *She wants us everyone to be respectful of differences that's why she told us her own personal story.*

Teacher Assessment: Ryan scores a "3" for the trait of realizing context. He provides slightly more analysis in this set of short-answer questions. His responses "generally answer the questions" and use context language—story's message, personal story—with some accuracy. He infers, or "reads between the lines," when he speaks of her desire that people "be respectful of differences" and his conclusion that "that's why she told us her own personal story." However, his responses still definitely stay within the confines of the questions.

Developing Interpretations

Instructions: List three major "problems" in "Beauty." Find quotes for evidence. Provide an analysis that explains the problems you have selected to interpret.

Ryan's Answer:

Problem	Clues and Evidence	Analysis/ Interpretation
Alice is shot in her eye.	*She can't see anymore.*	*She hates becoming disabled.*
Alice Walker loses all her self-esteem.	*She abuses her eye and rants and raves.*	*She takes her feelings of self-hatred out on her eye.*
Walker's daughterlooks at her mother's eye.	*She tells her it is a world.*	*Her daughter helps her realize that she is okay even if she is disabled.*

Teacher Assessment: Ryan scores a "3" for developing interpretations. In this brief, graphic organizer type of model, Ryan's brevity works in his favor; the connecting format of the model helps display his thinking positively. Each one of the three examples chosen is well connected, using clues and evidence to reflect the problem's reality in the essay, and his analysis is closely connected to his choices. His connections to a bigger picture, although very general, still fulfill some of the requirements of the "5" rubric. However, his lack of interpretation language usage and the fairly general nature of his examples hold this response to a "3."

Integrating for Synthesis

Instructions: Please complete each of the following sections using your best reading and thinking skills. You may refer to Alice Walker's essay as often as your like to check your information.

Question: Please list five important turning points in the essay "Beauty." Place them in chronological order and explain why you chose those particular details.

Ryan's Answer:

She is shot in the eye.
She feels bad about herself.
She blames her eye for her problems.
She worries about being disabled.
Her daughter accepts her.

These are the five big things that happen in the essay.

Question: Please list three characteristics of "character" that make Alice Walker different from her brothers and sisters.

Ryan's Answer: *Ugly, dumb (even though she wasn't) and different*

Question: Please list two cause-and-effect events that happen in the essay "Beauty," and explain why they are examples of cause and effect.

Ryan's Answer: *She is shot and she goes blind. She was normal and then she was disabled.*

Question: Have you ever felt a great appreciation for something that you had taken for granted? Please explain.

Ryan's Answer: *I think this essay tried to show us not to feel sorry for ourselves.*

Teacher Assessment: Ryan scores a "2" in integrating for synthesis on this series of short answer questions. His responses perform the synthesis application demanded by the question, but they are sketchy and incomplete in nature. His examples are straight from basic recall, and his attempts to integrate background knowledge with the essay's subject matter—"I think the essay tried to show us not to feel sorry for ourselves"—shows a generally "safe" approach to answering the question as opposed to really stretching to create strong responses reflective of his thinking.

Critiquing for Evaluation

Instructions: Please answer the following extended response question using your best reading skills to create a thoughtful response. Use quotes and specific examples whenever possible.

Question: Evaluate why it took the love and acceptance of her child to help Alice Walker feel whole again.

Ryan's Answer:

For many years, people have pointed out and ridiculed the "different." People were ridiculed for their appearances, beliefs, and ideas. Their actions and words are not just justified, though people often do this because they are a little scared of different and new things. Well, Alice Walker's story is one of many that shows people's response to the contacts between them.

As a child, Alice Walker had very high self-esteem. Neighbors in the community thought she was cute, intelligent, and had a lot of sense. After her eye injury, though, everything changed. She thought of herself as ugly and dumb once her brother accidentally shot her. Alice wouldn't look up or participate in school. She was ashamed of her appearance and shut everyone close to her out.

As Alice grew older, her self-esteem was slowly raised. She noticed that all the things she had missed out on when she felt bad were good and comforting to have back. People still tried to encourage her, though. For example, her brother was very kind to her, but she had always resented him, for he had made her "ugly." What took Alice to get better was someone who wouldn't feel sorry for her, didn't know what happened, and accepted her as she was. That's why when her daughter said she had a world in her eye, it opened her eyes to notice that not everyone judged her by her appearances.

Though people can be quite cruel to the disabled, they should try their hardest at anything they do. If they feel sorry for themselves, it just makes matters worse. It's a human way of life that people don't notice things until they change.

Teacher Assessment: Ryan's extended response scores a "3" for critiquing for evaluation. He does not use quotes to illustrate his evaluation, but he does refer to some general examples from the essay. The response does attempt to engage a larger world of ideas and discourse through the discussion of society's attitudes towards the disabled, but Ryan does not build his evaluation using specific points and details.

Overall Teacher Assessment: We now have a picture of Ryan's ability to respond across the breadth of the traits using his critical reading skills in this quantitative assessment. If we show his scores and placements across the range of the traits, they look like this:

	Conventions	*Comprehension*	*Context*	*Interpretation*	*Synthesis*	*Evaluation*
Literary Text Scoring Guide	2	2	3	3	2	3

Ryan's performance across the range of traits reveals the brevity and lack of depth to his short answers that we anticipated from the responses he provided on the Reading Interest Survey. Ryan is obviously a good reader. However, it appears that he is what has often been labeled a "passive reader"—one who takes in text, comprehends it, but has not yet learned how to "flex" his critical reading muscles and begin manipulating the text to perform other tasks. If we sat down with Ryan one-on-one, I think he would be surprised that his assessment did not reveal the strong reader he believes himself to be. Ryan's performance is a perfect example of a student who has consumed text all his life yet has not been asked to do anything more demanding than a summary book report. With the advent of state standards, Ryan's performance as a reader will now need to strengthen and mature, as will his ability to demonstrate that strength and maturity in written form to teachers and administrators.

Student Work Samples: Susanna, Ninth Grade

Before we administered the assessment, we asked Susanna and all the other students to complete a Reading Interest Survey to give us a picture of who they were as readers. (A blank Reading Interest Survey Form is included in the Appendix.) Susanna's RIS looked like this:

Reading Interest Survey

Name: *Susanna* **Grade**: *9* **Teacher**: *Bella*

How many minutes a day do you read? *An hour or so*

Do you read for enjoyment for just for homework: *both, actually, but I love to read when I go to bed*

Do your parents and other relatives read a lot? *Yes, both my parents read a lot.*

What are your favorite kinds of books? *Fiction, mostly American literature. I really got into Nathaniel Hawthorne this year in my Literature class.*

Do you read things other than books? For instance, do you read the newspaper or magazines? *Yes, I read a lot of magazines, usually about current events.*

What are some of your favorite activities? *Shopping with my friends, going out, listening to music.*

Do you ever read about those activities: *No, not really.*

What is the best book you ever read and why: *The Scarlet Letter because I thought it had some powerful imagery and symbols. I liked figuring them out.*

What is your favorite subject at school: *Literature classes.*

Do you like to read in that subject? Like what? *All the books and anthologies. I'm working on poetry, but it is a hard genre.*

What is one goal you have for yourself as a reader in this class? *To read from more centuries so I have an understanding of how symbols and imagery connect to other ideas like culture.*

What is your plan to meet your reading goal? *Maybe read some criticisms of other books. See what other people think about the things I am reading.*

As your teacher, how can I help you meet your reading goal? *Show me how to access some of that material.*

Teacher Assessment: Susanna is a reader demonstrating obvious interest in critical discourse. She is purposeful in her plans to meet her reading goals, and she definitely sees her teacher as a resource. She displays a knowledge of "reading between the lines" through her discussion of imagery and symbols, and her awareness that there may be symbols or images that cross centuries and influence culture is indicative of an insightful, thoughtful reader. I am looking forward to her short-answer responses!

Decoding Conventions

Instructions: Please write the most appropriate answer to each of the following questions concerning conventions and Alice Walker's essay, "Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self."

Question: "Beauty" is a special essay written by an author describing events from her growing-up years. What kind of genre is this personal essay? Are there other types of genre within the essay? What are they?

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Susanna's Answer: *I think this essay was written in several forms: autobiography, poetry, dialogue (people talking to each other) and monologue (Walker talking to herself). The different forms really affected me because some were more personal and others seemed to address feelings of self-esteem that we all have.*

Question: In writing a personal essay, what is the point of view (first-person, second-person, or third-person) Walker uses? How do you know? Does she ever change point of view? Why?

Susanna's Answer: *She uses first-person, dialogue, and sort of what I would call "reflective description." There are times that I feel like I am reading her journal. It seems so personal and so powerful. When she moves back and forth between writing as an adult reflecting on her life and writing as a child or a teenager reflecting on her life, I think the distance in perspective sometimes is really powerful.*

Question: Find and quote Walker's thesis statement for her essay and then explain why you chose that sentence.

Susanna's Answer: "*It's great fun being cute, but then one day it ended.*" *It is in italics and it bridges the adult-Walker and the child-Walker. It is that two perspectives that I was talking about. Plus, it really sets up for us that something important is about to happen.*

Question: Look at this sentence: "*Did I imagine the anguish of never looking up?*" Why did Walker italicize this statement?

Susanna's Answer: *Walker is appealing to us to agree with her. It is like saying almost to yourself—did I imagine that person said that? For some reason, the italics make it more personal.*

Question: Who is speaking and why does this passage sound different from the rest of the essay: "That night, as I do almost every night, I abuse my eye. I rant and rave about it, in front of the mirror. I plead with it to clear up before morning. I tell it I hate it and despise it. I do not pray for sight. I pray for beauty." "You did not change they say. "

Susanna's Answer: *I think this is interesting because it is Walker talking to herself again, yet she did not choose to put this information in italics. I think this part is what she actually did to combat her eye on a daily basis, so it is not happening inside her head. She wants us to know that it is real.*

Teacher Assessment: Susanna's responses to the short answer questions demonstrate a strong desire to grapple with the text and to explore her ideas in relation to the material. She receives a "4" for decoding conventions. Her responses directly answer the question, and use the text structure language in fairly specific ways. She also creates terms of her own when she calls Walker's style "reflective description." Although these are terrific responses, Susanna could push her responses just a bit more and use concrete examples to illustrate her thinking in regard to the various genre and style conventions Walker uses.

Establishing Comprehension

Instructions: Please answer the following questions using your best thinking and reading skills. Refer to the essay, "Beauty" as often as you like to check your answers and look for clues to make your explanations clear.

Question: Make a prediction about other Alice Walker writings that are about her childhood. What do you think they might be about?

Susanna's Answer: *I think her other writings probably use her experience as a basis for analyzing "big ideas." What I mean by that is, things like the pain of growing up, the struggle to make people understand you, feeling alone, etc.*

Question: Who are the major and minor characters in this essay? How did you decide which were major and which were minor?

Susanna's Answer: *Obviously Walker and her daughter are the major characters because the essay is about them and their relationship. The minor characters are all the other ones talked about in the essay that reflect something about Walker's choices and decisions. Sometimes she decides something because of what other people have said or done.*

Question: Look at this list of details and put "SI" next to the significant details that are key to describing the characters of Alice Walker. Put "SU" next to the details that are supporting details used to give us a fuller picture but are not as important as the significant details. Then, provide analysis why there is a difference between significant and supporting details.

Susanna's Answer:

(SU) "Take me, Daddy, I'm the prettiest!"
(SI) For six years I do not stare at anyone because I do not raise my head.
(SI) I do not pray for sight. I pray for beauty.
(SI) There was a world in my eye.

There is a difference between significant and supporting details, particularly in this list, because the significant details are the ones that support the overall theme. They are more abstract in a way. The supporting details are the ones that "flesh" out the essay for us. They are definitely concrete.

Question: Write a one- to two-sentence summary of the main conflict of the essay.

Susanna's Answer: *I think the main conflict of the essay is that, although Walker felt ugly on the outside, she was still whole on the inside. It took her daughter's unconditional love to teach Walker how to love herself and how to see her disfigurement as a powerful symbol of her strength.*

Question: How is the essay resolved?

Susanna's Answer: *The essay is resolved by how I just talked about in the other question. Her daughter saying, "Mommy, there's a world in your eye," showed Walker that her daughter loved her no matter what, and that her eye, even though it was blind and it didn't look like anyone else's, it was still her eye, and it made her special and unique.*

Teacher Assessment: Susanna receives a "5" in establishing comprehension. Her responses are "purposeful, expansive, and knowledgeable." They demonstrate confidence and directly answer the specific questions. Susanna has an excellent selection of details and quotes as well as analysis of those quotes. Susanna is able to "respond beyond the question" and build onto her responses toward "interpretative and inferential levels." Her discussion of the themes of "growing up, feeling alone, and trying to make people understand you" are evidence of critical engagement with the material. Further, her distinction between significant details as being "abstract" and supporting details as being "concrete" demonstrates a thoughtful and purposeful comprehension of the various levels of abstraction and the roles they play in text.

Realizing Context

Instructions: Please answer each of the questions to your best ability. Each of the questions may have many possible "right" answers; your job is to do your best to explain why you chose the answer you did. Refer to Walker's essay as often as you need to check your answers, and use details and clues for information.

Question: Please write some of the vocabulary words that you feel "belong" to this essay. Then, describe why you chose those terms.

Susanna's Answer: *I think that terms "sight," "blob," and "beauty" are all terms that really reflect the context of this essay. Sight means both being able to look around you and being able to "see" things that are invisible to the naked eye, like love, for example. Blob is another word that has a lot of meaning in this essay because it is not until the blob is removed that Walker feels like she is accepted by anyone. The last term, beauty, has a lot of meaning to this essay because beauty is not only in the eye of the beholder but in the eye of the person herself.*

Question: Please describe in your words what Alice Walker's childhood was like.

Susanna's Answer: *I think that Alice Walker grew up in a poor house in a Southern state. She appears to have grown up during the "Jim Crow" laws because she talks about no one stopping to help a "black family" after her brother shot her in the eye. She had to face lot of troubles with racism in addition to her problems with her eye.*

Question: What is Alice Walker's tone in the essay? Please quote a sentence from the essay that represents the tone you have described.

Susanna's Answer: Like I said before, I think she has a very reflective tone throughout the essay. Sometimes she seems removed from the experience, like it happened a long time ago, and then other times she seems really close to it like the events are just happening. Then her tone seems full of pain. One sentence that really sticks out in my mind is the "Did I imagine never looking up?" She remembered her childhood as painful and downcast.

Question: What is Alice Walker's purpose in writing this essay, "Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self"?

Susanna's Answer: *I think she wants to show all her readers that everyone has a different understanding of what beauty means. For example, when she says that her daughter looked at her eye admirably and says "Mommy, there's a world in your eye," she is amazed that her daughter finds the blue, crater scar beautiful.*

Teacher Assessment: Susanna scores a "5" for the trait of realizing context. Her responses "see inferential meanings and intended purposes, both implicit and explicit." When she says "sight means being able to see all around you and see things invisible to the naked eye, like love for example," Susanna demonstrates a strong inferential understanding of contextual vocabulary. When she speculates that Walker grew up during Jim Crow laws because "a man refused to help them when he saw they were a black family," she demonstrates her ability to link indepth and thoughtful examples with social and cultural realities. Lastly, her responses "go beyond the questions' limits and extend into indepth understanding of contextual relationships" when she describes the author's tone as reflective, sometimes close to the subject and sometimes far away. This is definitely one of the strongest samples of realizing context we have seen.

Developing Interpretations

Instructions: List three major "problems" in "Beauty." Find quotes that give you clues to interpret the textual problems. Provide an analysis that explains the problems you have selected to interpret. Connect them to a bigger picture in your analysis column.

Susanna's Answer:

Problem	Clues and Evidence	Analysis/ Interpretation
Alice loses the sight in her eye through a terrible accident with her brothers, and then she is told to lie about it.	*The last thing she sees is a "growing tree in a rising sea of blood."*	*Walker's last childhood vision disappears as the lies rise to overcome her.*
Alice fears that no one will ever think her beautiful again.	*She equates everything in life with negativity, including going to a school in an old death row prison.*	*Alice's hatred of her eye "skews" her vision. She sees everything as a bad reflection instead of looking for good in all situations.*
Even at the end of the essay Alice can't see herself beautiful even though she is a grown adult.	*Alice cringes when her daughter holds her mother's face between her hands.*	*Alice learns unconditional love when her child accepts her—and even celebrates the "world in her eye."*

Teacher Assessment: Susanna scores a "4" for the trait of developing interpretations. Her responses are well-connected, and she has a well-developed sense of the connections between identifying the problems and collecting clues and evidence in order to resolve the problem. However, Susanna's responses do not yet "move beyond the question and engage the bigger picture."

Integrating for Synthesis

Instructions: Please complete each of the following sections using your best reading and thinking skills. You may refer to Alice Walker's essay as often as your like to check your information.

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Question: Please list five important turning points in the essay, "Beauty." Place them in chronological order and explain why you chose those particular details.

Susanna's Answer:

1) *Alice Walker has lots of self-esteem as a very young child as she thinks she is "special" especially in her father's eyes.*
2) *Alice is shot in the eye by a BB from her brother's guns. They tell her to lie about it to their parents.*
3) *Alice's father tries to take her to the hospital, but a white man refuses to help their black family.*
4) *Alice loses all of her self-confidence and goes through life a bitter young student.*
5) *Alice has the scar removed from her eye, but the inner scar remains. It is not until the love of her daughter that she finally accepts herself.*

I think these are the most important turning moments in the essay. They illustrate not only the important events of the essay, but also the turns Walker's thinking and growing takes as she learns to accept herself. It is almost as if you don't know how much something is worth until you lose it.

Question: Please list three characteristics of "character" that make Alice Walker different from her brothers and sisters.

Susanna's Answer: *Alice is different than her brothers and sisters. She is one of the only siblings that actually makes it out of the sharecropper community where she grows up. She is more sensitive than her brothers and sisters as she mentions that her brothers grew up to own more guns even though they caused her to lose her sight because of them; she is more determined than her siblings as she goes on to get a college education; and she is more reflective than her siblings as she is always asking herself questions about her life while her siblings cannot remember her being affected by the accident.*

Question: Please list two cause-and-effect events that happen in the essay, "Beauty," and explain why they are examples of cause and effect.

Susanna's Answer: *When she says "Pick me, daddy, I'm the prettiest," and she knows that she will be one of the few eight children who get to go the fair with her father is the first example. Then, when she says, "That night, as I do almost every night, I abuse my eye. I rant and rave about it, in front of the mirror. I plead with it to clear up before morning. I tell it I hate it and despise it. I do not pray for sight. I pray for beauty. 'You did not change they say' " is another example of cause* *and effect. Both examples demonstrate actual events from the essay as well demonstrate cause and effect of her thinking.*

Question: Have you ever felt a great appreciation for something that you had taken for granted? Please explain.

Susanna's Answer: *I think I can sort of understand how Alice appreciates sight now after my dad having a heart attack. I really appreciate him now where as I took him for granted before we thought we might lose him. It puts things in perspective. I definitely thought about that when I was reading this essay.*

Teacher Assessment: Susanna scores a "4" for the trait of integrating for synthesis. Collectively, her responses are well-done, performing the synthesis application for the most part. She reflects an indepth understanding of some of the skills of integrating for synthesis when she examines features of Alice's character as opposed to those of Alice's siblings. When Susanna says that Alice is more sensitive, determined, and reflective than her siblings, she demonstrates a strong ability to not only read between the lines but read beyond the lines, as well, as she synthesizes much of the information and background knowledge of the events of the essay. Susanna's main area of improvement is the need for her responses to clarify the parallel development between textual issues, ideas, and events and background issues, ideas, and events. In all but one place, Susanna needs to build her integration of her sources together into more of a harmonious whole. All in all, however, this is a fine set of responses to the trait of integrating for synthesis.

Critiquing for Evaluation

Instructions: Please answer the following extended response question using your best reading skills to create a thoughtful response. Use quotes and specific examples whenever possible.

Question: Evaluate why it took the love and acceptance of her child to help Alice Walker feel whole again.

Susanna's Answer: *I thoroughly enjoyed reading this essay, and I believe it did a wonderful job using a childhood event to illustrate how our feelings of self-esteem result from very early events in our lives. Alice's use of the symbol of "sight" to describe not only the literal sight of her eye that* *was lost, but the visually ugly "sight" of her scarred eye, and the invisible "sight" she gained through learning compassion, acceptance, and kindness was key to understanding and "seeing" the meaning behind the words of this essay.*

However, this essay does much more than describe just the loss of self-esteem for young children who suffer from disfiguring accidents. Throughout the essay, Alice sprinkles observations and insights such as "my brothers grew up to own even more powerful guns," and "our high school homecoming queen was also shot by a gun" and "my family said I did not look down" all demonstrate that Alice's loss of actual sight caused her to be able to "see" things that others missed: mainly the ability to be reflective about her life and about being black in the South.

But, the tables turn again when Alice is supposedly grown up and over the pain of her childhood accident. But when her child holds her face in her hands and says, "Mommy, there's a world in your eye," Alice learns once again that it is through love and acceptance by others that we can accept ourselves. Alice's "scars" are finally healed and she can fully "see."

I am so glad I got the chance to read this essay. I thought it was really powerful, and I want to find some other essays she has written too.

Teacher Assessment: Susanna scores a "5" for the trait of critiquing for evaluation. Her extended response "thoroughly and thoughtfully answers the evaluation question." She uses the evaluation terminology well, and she has an excellent choice of examples and quotes to illustrate her thinking. Her response does indeed "move beyond the parameters of the question and critically engage the world of text and ideas in a solid, defensible critique."

Overall Teacher Assessment: We now have a picture of Susanna's ability to respond across the breadth of the traits using her critical reading skills in this quantitative assessment. If we show her scores and placements across the range of the traits, they look like this:

	Conventions	*Comprehension*	*Context*	*Interpretation*	*Synthesis*	*Evaluation*
Literary Text Scoring Guide	4	5	5	4	4	5

Overall, Susanna demonstrates a strong, thoughtful, well-developed approach to her short-answer assessment questions. She is particularly strong in using quotes to defend her critical reading of Alice Walker's essay. The quantitative assessment model demands a great deal of stamina from student readers, and Susanna is an excellent example of a student reader who maintained high quality throughout, paying attention to detail, and using her specific reading skills to demonstrate a genuine picture of her strengths as a reader.

Lesson Plans for Each of the Traits of an Effective Reader

Next in this chapter, "High School and Beyond: Reading for School-to-Work and Higher Education," we've created six assessment opportunities—one for each trait—for you to use in your high school classroom. We've described how each "task" or "tool" fits within the ongoing or cumulative category, the qualitative or quantitative category, and, of course, we've described how to offer your students plenty of voice and choice.

DECODING CONVENTIONS: Translations

Assessment type: *task*
Type of task or tool: *ongoing; quantitative*
Voice: *high; individual participation*
Choice: *moderate*
Skill focus: *components of conventions*
Selected text: *grade level appropriate; drama selections are most appropriate*
Suggested age group: *high school*
Time required: *30-40 minutes*

Description:

This activity is designed to make "impenetrable" texts more accessible for student readers. Students work in small groups, reading and "translating" particular scenes from a play. They translate from one vernacular speech form to another while maintaining the essence of the original meaning of a passage. Some plays open to "translation" include Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet.*

Materials/Preparation:

1) Choose several difficult passages from a class text.
2) Ask students to begin interpreting the passages. Some questions for the passage might include: "Who is speaking?" "What is the purpose?" "What is happening?"
3) Examine the passages for clues to begin decoding and translating the various text features and issues.
4) Rewrite the sample passages using another "voice." Suggestions include "Western," "Southern," or "California beach talk."

What to Do:

1) Split the class into equal small groups.
2) Pass out selected scenes from a play.
3) Have students read their passages and begin looking for clues to begin decoding the textual features of the passages.
4) Have them "rewrite" their passages into standard English while maintaining the passage's original meaning.
5) Have them "rewrite" the passages again into another vernacular speech pattern.
6) Have them perform the "new" passages for one another.

Desired Outcomes:

- Students "demystify" texts and see how meaning varies with textual structure and languages
- Students learn to manipulate texts and interpret meanings based on textual clues
- Students enhance their oral communications skills through the presentation of their reading passages

ESTABLISHING COMPREHENSION: Purposeful Organization

Assessment type: *task*
Type of task or tool: *ongoing; quantitative*
Voice: *high; individual participation*
Choice: *moderate*
Skill focus: *components of comprehension*
Selected text: *grade-level appropriate; informational texts work best*
Suggested age group: *high school*
Time required: *30-40 minutes*

Description:

This activity teaches student readers how to organize their comprehension of an informational text purposefully. Using their "skimming and scanning" skills, students use highlighter pens or Post-it® Notes to organize their comprehension. They are asked to search and locate main ideas, specific details, significant and supporting examples, thesis statements, cause-and-effect points, hypotheses, and conclusions.

Materials/Preparation:

1) Selected class text; even a textbook works well
2) Highlighter pen or Post-it® Notes for every student.
3) Sample passage to model for student work.
4) Select several criteria skills from the trait of establishing comprehension.
5) Model for students how to scan and skim a passage looking for particular points.

What to Do:

1) Choose a chapter, a subchapter, or a specific text for students to scan/skim.
2) Set a predetermined time limit—say, 20 minutes.
3) Have students read their passages, scanning and skimming for preselected information (criteria). Some examples may include main ideas, thesis statement, significant details, supporting details, hypotheses, conclusions.
4) Have students identify their selected criteria using highlighter pens or Post-it® Notes.
5) Call time, and ask students to share with their partners their post-it notes or highlighted passages.
6) Check as a class to see how far people progressed in their skimming and scanning.

7) Questions might include: What text features did you use to organize your reading? How did you know where to find different comprehension elements of the text?

Desired Outcomes:

- Students practice applicable useful skills for school-to-work and beyond
- Students see organizational features of texts
- Students develop processing and sequencing skills

REALIZING CONTEXT: Questioning Strategies

Assessment type: *tool*
Type of task or tool: *cumulative; quantitative*
Voice: *high; individual participation*
Choice: *moderate*
Skill focus: *components of context*
Selected text: *grade level appropriate; literary texts work best*
Suggested age group: *high school*
Time required: *30-40 minutes*

Description:

In this great activity, students learn to "read between the lines" by starting with highly accessible entrance points into the contextual aspects of the text. Starting with contextual vocabulary, moving into the tone, voice, and purpose of the author, and finally arriving at the cultural and social realities of the text, students move through an assessment tool that encourages critical reading.

Materials/Preparation:

1) Choose a literary text at grade level.
2) Select a passage that lends itself to inference.
3) Discuss with students the idea of looking on the surface of a text.
4) Discuss with students the idea of looking between the lines of a text.
5) Discuss with students the idea of looking beyond the lines of a text.
6) Provide some examples.

What to Do:

1) Read the selected text together as a class.
2) Break students up into partners.
3) Have students analyze the passage looking for the three levels of questioning strategies:
   Level One: What are the vocabulary words that "belong" to this text? How do you select them?
   Level Two: What is the author's tone, voice, and purpose in this text? How do you know?
   Level Three: What is the social or cultural reality of this text? How do you know?

Desired Outcomes:

- Students develop the ability to move between the literal, inferential, and evaluative levels of textual material
- Students see "indicators" in texts—for example, vocabulary—that give them clues to aid in inference skills
- Students see a point-by-point progression that describes the many layers of texts

DEVELOPING INTERPRETATIONS: Short-Answer Assessment

Assessment type: *tool*
Type of task or tool: *cumulative; quantitative*
Voice: *high; individual participation*
Choice: *moderate*
Skill focus: *components of interpretation*
Selected text: *grade level appropriate; literary texts work best*
Suggested age group: *high school*
Time required: *30-40 minutes*

Description:

In designing a short-answer assessment model, students learn the four steps to producing verifiable interpretations of literary and informational texts. By "practicing" each step of a well-developed interpretation, students see how textual analysis is multilayered and well-documented. It works well with a small section of text at first—say a sentence or two from a novel or a short story. Stress to your student readers that they must use specific detail and specific examples in their short answers for full credit.

Materials/Preparation:

1) Choose your passage.
2) Design your questions for short-answer response.
3) Demonstrate and model a sample response.
4) Evaluate your four-question, short-answer model using the Lab scoring guide.
5) Have your students debate the qualities of your short answers.

What to Do:

1) Share your selected text with your students.
2) Go through the four-step process:
   Question One: What is the problem, gap, or ambiguity in this passage?
   Question Two: What are the clues and evidence you can gather both from background information and textual information to address your selected issue?
   Question Three: What is your interpretation of the problem, gap, or ambiguity? How do you resolve the problem, bridge the gap, or clarify the ambiguity?

Question Four: What is the bigger picture implied in your interpretation of the issue?

3) Have your students work in partners jointly answering the four-step short answers.
4) Hand out another passage and have your students complete the four-step process alone.
5) Assess their samples using the Lab rubric.

Desired Outcomes:

- Students understand and practice the four step process of interpretation
- Students see the connections between defensible interpretations and good selection of evidence
- Students develop the skills of searching for clues in texts and in background information

INTEGRATING FOR SYNTHESIS: Informational Text Outline

Assessment type: *tool*
Type of task or tool: *cumulative; quantitative*
Voice: *high; individual participation*
Choice: *moderate*
Skill focus: *components of synthesis*
Selected text: *grade level appropriate; must use informational text.*
Suggested age group: *high school*
Time required: *30-40 minutes*

Description:

In this activity, students complete an Informational Text Outline in which they see the six main components of the informational text: main idea, supporting facts, supporting examples, supporting statistics, expert authority, and inferential conclusion. Working in groups, they take responsibility for one of the sections, but in a whole class discussion they notice how their section fits in with the whole. This is an excellent research tool—one sure to follow student readers in their work in higher education and beyond.

Materials/Preparation:

1) Choose an informational text: newspaper articles and magazine articles work best.
2) Explain the six components of an informational text.
3) Discuss the differences between facts, examples, and statistics.
4) Examine some statements and have students discuss whether they are facts, examples, or statistics.
5) Prepare students for the passage.

What to Do:

1) Have students break into six even groups for work purposes.
2) Have the students read the informational text silently to themselves.
3) Discuss the article together as a class.
4) Collaboratively have students decide: What is the main idea of this article?
5) In their separate groups, have students find three examples of their group's focus.
6) For the "facts" group they must find three facts (statements that can be proven by evidence) that relate to the main idea.

7) For the "examples" group, they must find three examples (names of people, places, or specific things that are involved in an event that illustrate the main idea) that support the main idea of the informational text.
8) For the "statistics" group, they must find three statistics (facts or examples that are listed in comparative form) that connect to the main idea.
9) For the "expert authority" group, they must find three statements that are direct quotes from expert authorities in their article. They must connect the statements to the main idea.
10) For the "inferred conclusions" group, they must draw three conclusions that the article's main idea supports and provides through the evidence of facts, examples, statistics, and statements of expert authority.

Desired Outcomes:

- Students learn effective research strategies through working in small groups
- Students learn organizational components of informational texts
- Students gain skill in distinguishing between different components of informational texts

CRITIQUING FOR EVALUATION: Creating Extended Responses

Assessment type: *tool*
Type of task or tool: *cumulative; qualitative*
Voice: *high; individual participation*
Choice: *high*
Skill focus: *components of evaluation*
Selected text: *grade level appropriate*
Suggested age group: *high school*
Time required: *30-40 minutes*

Description:

In this activity, students "practice" for high stakes assessment opportunities such as advanced placement exams, college entrance exams, high school exit exams, and midterms and finals in core content areas. They evaluate a text using their critical evaluation skills and the series of ideas and steps presented in the beginning of this chapter that illustrate the components of a successful extended response.

Materials/Preparation:

1) Choose a text, literary or informational, that lends itself to evaluation.
2) A text such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* is an excellent choice due to its cultural, social, and historical components.
3) Work through each of the skills of critiquing for evaluation to demonstrate the power of a thoughtful critique.

What to Do:

1) Provide several extended-response questions for your students to choose from.
2) Have your students develop several questions themselves.
3) Go through the seven-step process of solid extended responses.
4) Provide a 45-minute period for students to brainstorm, process, draft, and revise their extended responses.
5) Provide them with a copy of the Critiquing for Evaluation Scoring Guide so that they can self-assess their extended response.
6) Have them turn in a statement of self-assessment with their extended responses

Desired Outcomes:

- Students develop the skills of critique and evaluation
- Students learn to implement criteria into their reading responses
- Students develop a cohesive plan for expressing their reading comprehension, interpretation, and application

Suggested Titles for Read Aloud and Read Alone

Elizabeth George Speare. *Sign of the Beaver*. Houghton Mifflin, 1983.

Jerry Spinelli. *Maniac Magee*. Little, Brown, 1990.

Lloyd Alexander. *The Book of Three*. Holt, 1964; Dell, 1978.

Robert Cormier. *The Chocolate War*. Pantheon, 1974; Dell, 1986.

Jean Craighead George. *Julie of the Wolves*. Harper, 1972.

Scott O'Dell. *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. Houghton Mifflin, 1960; Dell, 1987.

Katherine Paterson. *Bridge to Terabithia*. Crowell, 1977; Harper, 1987.

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings. *The Yearling*. Scribner's, 1962; Macmillan, 1988.

Wilson Rawis. *Where the Red Fern Grows*. Doubleday, 1961, 1973.

Mildred Taylor. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. Dial, 1976; Puffin, 1991.

Cynthia Voigt. *Homecoming*. Atheneum, 1981.

End Notes

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[1] Randy Bomer, *Time for Meaning: Crafting Literate Lives in Middle and High School*. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinneman, 1995, p. 114.

Glossary of Reading Assessment Terms

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is the process by which school districts and states attempt to ensure that schools and school systems meet their goals.

ACHIEVEMENT TESTS

Achievement tests are standardized tests designed to measure the amount of skill or knowledge students have in a specific, focused area. All "standardized" tests are administered the same way; scoring, also uniform, is usually by machines. The tests are also designed to reflect somewhat standardized means of instruction.

ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT

Alternative assessment is any assessment in which the student creates a response to a question rather than choosing from responses that have been provided. Types of alternative assessments include: short answer, extended response, constructed response, dialogue journal, Dear Reader and Dear Author letters, and graphic organizers.

ANALYTICAL TRAITS

Analytical traits are the recognized qualities of a student performance or product. The traits of an effective reader, for example, assess the quality of a student response in six separate reading response areas. When looked at individually, students can see their strengths and weaknesses as a reader; in essence, it is their "profile of performance."

ASSESSMENT

To assess means to "sit beside," from the Latin word *assidere*. When we assess reading, we observe, collect information, provide instructional support, and measure our students' performance based on criteria. In reading assessment, we can measure student achievement through oral performances, written responses, or standardized tests. Assessment also means for the student to reflect upon his or her learning and set goals toward achieving better understanding.

AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

Authentic assessment is the observation and judgment of student performance or quality of product based on a task or tool that elicits real-life situations or responses to current events.

CLOZE EXERCISE

In a cloze assessment, teachers provide a passage, story, poem, nonfiction text, or book for students to read. After completing the pre-reading, teachers provide students with a passage from the original text or from a passage written to respond to the original text. In this passage, however, certain words or phrases are left blank. Students are asked to fill in the blanks with words that create the fullest meaning.

COMPETENCY TEST

A competency test is a test designed to demonstrate that a student has met established standards in skills or knowledge.

CONSTRUCTED RESPONSE

In this type of assessment, students begin moving from process to product of reading achievement. This type of assessment asks student to focus on "what they know and how they know it." They literally construct a "frame" through description, context, and reaction to a text. "Constructed scope" responses usually take the form of short-answer questions where students are asked to specifically "construct" an answer in response to one question focused on one trait.

CRITERIA

Criteria is the language or the description that defines levels of performance for each trait assessed. When criteria is used, there is no "right" or "wrong" answer; instead, we have a continuum of performance where responses are judged using criteria as the indicators of quality.

CRITERION-REFERENCED TEST

In a criterion-referenced test, student are not compared with each other. Instead, each student is measured against criteria that describe levels of performance.

DEAR AUTHOR LETTERS

In this type of assessment, students are encouraged to write letters to the authors of books, stories, poems, and informational pieces they have read, discussed, dissected, and digested. This is a formal—end of the unit—type of assessment where pre-writing, revising, and editing all count toward making your "reading response" as insightful and accessible as possible.

DEAR READER LETTERS

In a Dear Reader Letter, students can respond orally as a "book expert" speaking to a class, answering questions, and directing discussion, or respond in a written format responding to "Dear Author Letters." In this written context, they can respond to actual or imaginary issues raised by reader. This is their moment to shine as an "expert!"

DIALOGUE JOURNAL

In this type of assessment, students, groups, and teachers respond in writing to one another through the form of a dialogue. The actual "exchange" of information is fluid and determined by choices made by each reader. Teachers and group members can respond to one another by challenging deeper interpretations and perspectives. Lots of open-ended questions posed to one another are highly effective.

EVALUATION

An evaluation is a judgment about whether a product or program is producing the desired results. Evaluations are usually based on multiple sources of information such as surveys, test scores, and observations.

EXTENDED RESPONSE

An extended response is an assessment mechanism designed to elicit a student's indepth knowledge of a particular subject, his or her organizational ability to process that subject, and his or her problem-solving capacity to synthesize multiple sources in order to create a thoughtful response to a specific question.

GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS

In a graphic organizer, students and teachers create a pictorial diagram of a text. Using "maps" or "webs," students discuss, confer, compare, and decide on important "turning points" in the text that can be depicted visually.

HIGH-STAKES TESTING

High-stakes testing occurs whenever a major, significant decision with strong consequences is made on the basis of test results.

MISCUE ANALYSIS

A more formal teacher-recorded observation of students reading texts aloud. Teachers look for specific "miscues"—areas where students have trouble decoding words, phrases, or ideas. This "record" records words they may substitute when faced with a difficult word to pronounce or de-code by meaning.

NORM-REFERENCED TEST

In a norm-referenced test, a student's performance is compared to that of students who are like them—a peer group known as a "norm-group."

PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

Performance assessment is based on direct observation of a student's response, and the quality of the performance is judged by a set of clearly defined criteria at the emerging, developing, and advanced levels.

PORTFOLIO

A portfolio is a purposefully chosen selection of student work that tells the story of a student's growth in achievement in well-defined content-specific areas. A portfolio also includes a detailed analysis by the student that narratives and describes the growth of the particular student.

PROMPT

A prompt is a stimulus to give students an entrance way to expressing their comprehension, understanding, and interpretation of a text. Prompts are almost always in the form of questions.

QUALITATIVE

Qualitative assessment models that focus on one or two identified skills of a particular trait on the scoring guide are qualitative in design. Although you look for *quantity* of response (enough information) to make a sound judgment, the model is typically designed to show depth of ability.

QUANTITATIVE

Quantitative assessment models address each identified skill of a particular trait on the scoring guide. Although you look for *quality* in the responses to each skill, the model is typically designed to show breadth of ability.

READING TASK

Tasks are activities that teach, model, and anecdotally assess student reading using criteria. Tasks assess student responses informally.

READING TOOL

Tools are assignments that have clearly defined criteria that assess student reading ability using a scoring guide or developmental continuum. Tools assess student responses formally.

SCORING GUIDE

A scoring guide is written criteria that teachers, parents, and students can follow to judge the quality of a student response to a specific assessment tool. It usually reflects indicators that describe three levels of performance: high, medium, and low.

STANDARDS

Standards may be national, regional, or local expectations for student achievement in specifrc content areas against which student progress is measured.

STANDARDS-DRIVEN ASSESSMENT

Standards-driven assessments are large-scale classroom assessments that provide information about individual students and groups of students, assessing their proficiencies in relation to a set of publicly articulated standards.

STUDENT RECORD

Sometimes called a "Reading Response Journal" or "Reader's Notebook," a student-maintained record consists of entries written and monitored by the student. In this notebook they can record their reactions to books read aloud by teachers, to texts read in all content areas, or to texts read for personal pleasure and enrichment.

TEACHER RECORD

A teacher record is a series of informal notes taken while students read aloud and respond to oral questions about the text. Teachers may note the development and growth of: reading fluency, reading expression, awareness of textual conventions, syntax difficulty or success, ability to decode and form literal comprehension of texts, desire to problem solve, drive to make connections, and willingness to question.

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APPENDIX A

Reading Interest Survey

Name: ____________________ **Grade:** _____ **Teacher:**_____________________

How many minutes a day do you read? ____________________________________

Do you read for enjoyment or just for homework? __________________________

Do your parents or other relatives read a lot? ______________________________

Do you read out loud to adults in your home? ______________________________

What are your favorite kinds of books? ____________________________________

Do you read things other than books? Newspapers? Magazines? ______________

What are some of your favorite activities? __________________________________

Do you ever read about those activities? ___________________________________

What is the best book you have ever read and why? __________________________

What is your favorite subject at school? ____________________________________

Do you like to read in that subject? What kinds of texts? ____________________

____

What is one goal you have for yourself as a reader in this class? ______________

What is your plan to meet your reading goal? _______________________________

As your teacher, how can I help you meet your reading goal? _________________

APPENDIX B

The Traits of an Effective Reader
Kindergarten—3rd Grade
Developmental Continuum

Bridging Readers	Expanding Readers	Developing Readers	Beginning Readers	Emerging Readers
— Fluent with all kinds of literature.	— Experimenting with all kinds of literature.	— Have found a "niche" with literature.	— Searching for literature they like.	— Exploring literature.
— Accurately using strategies.	— Consistently using strategies.	— Gaining confidence while using strategies.	— Realizing the need for strategies.	— Practicing reading aloud.
— Thinking and reading have merged into critical thinking.	— Making the ties themselves to thinking and reading.	— Connecting thinking and reading with guidance.	— Beginning to see the connections.	— Just getting introduced to thinking about reading.
			— Between thinking and reading.	

The Traits of an Effective Reader
Kindergarten—3rd Grade
Developmental Continuum

Emerging Readers

Decode Conventions by:

- Choosing reading material independently.
- Seeing self as a "reader."
- Recognize familiar words in print.
- Locating title and author on book cover.

Establish Comprehension by:

- Making meaningful predictions based on illustrations.
- Relying on illustrations more heavily than print for meaning.
- Identifying characters in a story.

Realizing Context by:

- Recognizing familiar paces, words.
- Expressing interest in common events discussed in literature.
- Assigning characteristics to characters in stories (angry, sad, happy).

Developing Interpretation by:

- Participating in literature discussions.
- Voicing a problem found in a story.
- Expressing concern over story conflict.

Integrating for Synthesis by:

- Connecting read aloud books to own experience.
- Learning information from stories and sharing with others.
- Identifying beginning, middle, and end of story visually.

Critiquing for Evaluation by:

- Explaining why he or she liked or disliked story using own words.
- Explaining why he or she thought a story was "good" asking questions about a story.

The Traits of an Effective Reader
Kindergarten—3rd Grade
Developmental Continuum

Beginning Readers

Decoding Conventions by:	Establishing Comprehension by:	Realizing Context by:	Developing Interpretation by:	Integrating for Synthesis by:	Critiquing for Evaluation by:
— Identifies basic literary genres (poetry, story, play). — Using basic punctuation when reading orally. — Using sentence structure cues with guidance. — Using letter sound cues when reading orally. — Beginning to self-correct when reading orally.	— Relying on illustrations and print. — Using reading strategies with modeling and guidance. — Retelling beginning, middle, and end with guidance. — Finding the "main character" in a story.	— Beginning to recognize high frequency words. — Identifying point of view with modeling and guidance (who is talking now?). — Beginning to use meaning cues to increase vocabulary. — Making initial attempts at inferring meaning.	— Responding to facts, characters, situations in stories. — Participating and understanding the need for literature discussions to expand meaning. — Attempting to orally grapple with a problem in a story.	— Retelling story events in a sequential order with guidance. — Comparing and/or contrasting story with own experience. — Finding explicit similarities and differences in characters.	— Identifying particular reading strategies and setting goals with guidance. — Explaining why story is liked or disliked by citing a scene, character trait, or problem in story. — Questioning why something happens in a story.

The Traits of an Effective Reader
Kindergarten—3rd Grade
Developmental Continuum

Developing Readers

Decode Conventions by:	Establish Comprehension by:	Realize Context by:	Developing Interpretation by:	Integrating for Synthesis by:	Critiquing for Evaluation
— Beginning to read out loud with fluency on familiar stories — Identifying chapter titles, table of contents (text organizers). — Identifying genres with ease. — Beginning to read aloud with expression.	— Summarizing with reference to single "parts" of stories-characters, plot, setting. — Using pre-reading strategies, during reading and post-reading strategies with deliberation. — Distinguishing between an obvious major and minor character. — Retelling beginning, middle and end by self.	— Using meaning clues consistently. — Beginning to use "contextual" vocabulary in oral and written responses to stories. — Identifying point of view by self. — Inferring meaning with practice. — Identifying tone and voice with guidance.	— Generating thoughtful oral and written responses to stories based on discussion questions. — Accurately identifying major conflict or "problem" of story. — Connecting facts and situations in stories to conflicts ("that happened because…").	— Putting story in chronological order even if not originally that way. — Beginning to use other resources-encyclopedia or non-fiction texts to gain information. — Using charts, graphs, tables and maps with guidance to depict story information. — Understanding the concept of cause and effect with guidance.	— Seeking out challenging reading material with guidance. — Setting goals and identifying ways to improve own reading with guidance. — Explaining why a story is "good" based on reason combined with story element. — Questioning and risking by asking why characters act in certain way or why a story ends.

The Traits of an Effective Reader
Kindergarten—3^{rd} Grade
Developmental Continuum

Expanding Readers

Decode Conventions by:	Establish Comprehension by:	Realizing Context by:	Developing Interpretation by:	Integrating for Synthesis by:	Critiquing for Evaluation by:
— Identifying sub-genres—mysteries, histories, autobiographies, fantasies, etc. — Reading aloud with expressive fluency in self-chosen genres. — Identifying more text organizers-captions, unit headings. — Elements of punctuation, grammar	— Summarizing "whole" stories in addition to their parts. — Using reading strategies consistently. — Summarizing a literary "purpose" (explaining the moral of fable for example) with guidance. — Relying primarily on print to establish understanding. — Learning that a "detail" is used to describe an element of a story.	— Gaining deeper meaning by "reading between the lines" with guidance. — Using contextual vocabulary with confidence. — Articulating "difference" in stories-race, class, gender-with guidance. — Identifying the "tone" of the author or story with guidance. — Making good guesses at the time period of the story with guidance.	— Attempting to "resolve" a problem in story through analysis. — Distinguishing between fact and opinion with modeling, guidance and examples. — Confidently developing an extended response to discussion questions. — Beginning to see a bigger picture."	— Using resources other than stories) to locate information independently. — Integrating non-fiction information to develop a deeper understanding with guidance. — Finding information using "alphabetical order." — Using charts, graphs, and tables with confidence to depict story lines and information. — Understanding the relationship between cause and effect and finding it in a story.	— Actively seeking out challenging reading material by self. — Actively identifying reading strengths and challenges and setting goals. — Responding to issues and ideas in literature as well as facts or story events. — Posing alternative scenarios with guidance. — Beginning to think of reading as a "critical skill" ("I know I can use reading to learn information and solve problems.")

The Traits of an Effective Reader
Kindergarten—3rd Grade
Developmental Continuum

Bridging Readers

Decode Conventions by:

- Identifying genres and sub-genres independently.
- Reading aloud fluently in more than one genre.
- Identifying text organizers including index, glossary, content area titles.
- Identifying complex punctuation and sentence structures with guidance.

Establish Comprehension by:

- Actively seeking print to gain understanding (I want to read to find out).
- Identifying the turning moments of a story with guidance.
- Beginning to distinguish between significant and supporting detail.
- Summarizing whole stories and parts of stories with ease.

Realizing Context by:

- Seeking deeper meaning by "reading between the lines."
- Using contextual vocabulary with confidence.
- Articulating "difference" in stories-race, class, gender.
- Identifying the "tone" of the author or story with confidence.
- Making good guesses at the time period of the story based on textual clues.
- Beginning to see relationships between time, history, culture, society and stories with guidance.

Developing Interpretation by:

- Generating in-depth responses orally and in written form.
- Recognizing the resolution of a problem in story through analysis as part of reading.
- Distinguish between fact and opinion with a degree of success.
- Seeing a "bigger picture" as part of reading.
- Making consistent conscious connections between analysis and reading.

Integrating for Synthesis by:

- Reading for information and to solve problems with ease.
- Adding depth to responses by connecting to other reading and/or experiences.
- Comparing and contrasting two stories with guidance.
- Integrating multiple perspectives to form a thoughtful response.

Critiquing for Evaluation by:

- Actively seeking out challenging reading material across content areas.
- Actively identifying reading strengths and challenges and setting goals.
- Responding to issues and ideas in literature as well as facts or story events.
- Posing alternative scenarios with success.
- Thinking of reading as a "critical skill" ("I know I can use reading to learn information and solve problems.")
- Critiquing literature's quality with reasons and examples from stories that illustrate successful use of story elements (The ending was good because I was surprised; the author did a good job keeping the mystery a "secret.")

APPENDIX C

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

The Traits of an Effective Reader
Reading a Literary Text Scoring Guide
Grades 3-12

Developed by Lesley D. Thompson, Ph.D.

Decoding Conventions

- The writing *conventions* of grammar, punctuation, word recognition, sentence structure
- The organizational *conventions* of the author, the title, the characters, the theme, the conflict, and the resolution of stories, poems, plays
- The genre *conventions* (poetry, drama, fiction) of the types of modes (narrative, autobiographical, persuasive, ironic, objective) appropriate to each literary genre, the distinctions between each literary genre, the expectations readers have for literary genres

5 The advanced response demonstrates confidence in decoding conventions of literary texts and uses conventions information to form a thoughtful "thinking frame" of a text.
The response or responses directly answer the question(s) and use appropriate text structure language in specific and precise ways. The response or responses select an excellent example or several excellent examples to illustrate the reader's understanding of conventions. The examples are well-supported and the connections are clear. The response or responses also demonstrate a willingness and a desire to respond "beyond" the question(s) by building onto the initial question(s) and enlarging the thinking frame.

3 The developing response is growing in confidence in decoding conventions of the literary text and uses conventions information to form an initial "thinking frame" of the text.
The response or responses answer the question(s) generally and use some basic text structure language appropriately. The response or responses can allude to a general example or examples from the text to illustrate the reader's understanding of the conventions. The response or responses are fairly safe and stay definitely within the confines of the question(s).

1 The emerging response is just beginning to decode conventions and often times the challenge of decoding gets in the way of forming a "thinking frame" for the literary text.
The response or responses do not adequately answer the question (s) but may use text structure language to demonstrate some knowledge and application of decoding conventions. The response or responses do not usually provide an example or examples from the text but instead focus on more general information. The response or responses can usually be characterized as sketchy and incomplete.

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

The Traits of an Effective Reader

Reading a Literary Text Scoring Guide

Grades 3-12

Developed by Lesley D. Thompson, Ph.D.

Establishing Comprehension

- Use pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading strategies to "squeeze" meaning out of the literary text
- Identify the plot, the major (round) and minor (flat) characters, the "turning moments," main themes in literary texts
- Distinguish between significant and supporting details and events for plot, characters, main ideas and main themes
- Summarize and paraphrase with purpose to move towards making inferences and interpretations

5 The advanced response demonstrates a purposeful, expansive and knowledgeable comprehension of a literary text.

The response or responses confidently and directly answer the specific question(s) using comprehension terms to indicate precise understandings. The response or responses select an excellent example or examples to illustrate the reader's in-depth comprehension. Examples chosen are well-developed using clear and specific language and terms. The response or responses also demonstrate a willingness and a desire to respond "beyond" the question(s) by building onto the initial question(s) and increasing comprehension of a literary text into inferential and interpretative levels.

3 The developing response demonstrates an adequate comprehension of a literary text. Purposeful comprehension is still evolving.

The response or responses answer the question(s) in general ways using some comprehension terms to indicate general understandings. The response or responses may select an example or examples to illustrate the reader's literal comprehension. Examples chosen are somewhat "safe" and obvious choices. The response or responses do not venture beyond the initial question(s).

1 The emerging response is searching to establish a basic comprehension of a literary text.

The response or responses do not adequately answer the question(s). The response or responses do not provide examples for evidence but sometimes restate the question using the same words. It is not evident if a basic comprehension of a literary text has been achieved. The response or responses can be characterized as sketchy and incomplete.

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

The Traits of an Effective Reader
Reading a Literary Text Scoring Guide
Grades 3-12
Developed by Lesley D. Thompson, Ph.D.

Realizing Context

- The vocabulary reflective of the context of the literary text
- The writing mode, tone, and voice the author selected with respect to the context
- The time period and its accompanying social realities in the literary text
- The setting of the literary text and its relationship to social factors
- The cultural aspects of literary texts

5 The advanced response realizes context and sees inferential meanings and intended purposes, both implicit and explicit.

The response or responses directly and specifically answer the question(s) using appropriate context terms to demonstrate understanding of inferential meaning. The response or responses use a clear and well-chosen example or examples to illustrate understandings of contextual issues. The response or response go beyond the question's limits and extend into an in-depth understandings of contextual relationships in literary texts.

3 The developing response realizes the context of the literary text to some degree and recognizes obvious types of inference.

The response or responses generally answer the question(s) and use some context terminology to show a basic level of understanding. The response or responses may use an example or examples to illustrate understanding. The response or responses usually stay within the safe confines of the question.

1 The emerging response guesses at context, but has difficulty accessing inferential types of knowledge.

The response or responses do not adequately address the question(s). The response or responses do not use examples from the text to illustrate inferential understandings. Sometimes the question is just restated using the same words. There is not enough evidence to decide if the reader understood the contextual layers of the literary text.

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Grades 3-12

Developed by Lesley D. Thompson, Ph.D.

Developing Interpretations

- Identify problems, gaps, ambiguities, symbols, and/or metaphors in literary texts
- Distinguish the contextual source behind the textual material that opens the text up to scrutiny
- Pose analytical explanations that bridge the gap, clarify the ambiguity, and resolve textual problems
- Connect analytical explanations to a "bigger picture."

5 The advanced response interprets to analyze and think critically about literary texts.

The response or responses directly answers the question(s) using specific evidence, clues, and "on target" information. The response or responses use appropriate language that reflects an in-depth understanding of the skills of interpretation. Examples, quotes, and events are cited from the text and connected strongly to the analysis. The response or responses move beyond the question(s), engage the bigger picture—a literary framework of historical significance, cultural importance or universal theme.

3 The developing response interprets to expand the text, but is still developing the connections to a larger world view.

The response or responses generally answer the question using some language that indicates an initial layer of interpretation understanding. The response or responses are generally safe, and cite very obvious examples from the text. Connections between the examples and the analysis are not always evident. The response or responses do not yet move beyond the question. Engaging the "bigger picture" is still a developing skill.

1 The emerging response sees interpretation as "talking about a book." Reading and interpreting are still separate processes.

The response or responses do not adequately address the question(s). The response does not cite examples, quotes, or evidence from the literary text to use as a basis for interpretation. Sometimes the question is just restated using the same words. There is not enough evidence of interpretation skill to accurately judge whether the student understands the concept of interpretation.

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The Traits of an Effective Reader
Reading a Literary Text Scoring Guide
Grades 3-12

Developed by Lesley D. Thompson, Ph.D.

Integrating for Synthesis

- Put information in order to explain a literary text's process and/or chronology
- Compare and contrast characters, story lines, events, and primary and secondary sources in order to make defensible judgments, interpretations, and decisions
- Recognize and describe the relationship between cause and effect in literary texts
- Integrate personal experience, background knowledge, and/or content knowledge with the literary text to create a "synthesis" of text plus knowledge

5 The advanced response integrates textual material and other types of knowledge, and uses decision-making skills to create a synthesis of ideas from a literary text.

The response or responses directly, specifically, and concretely perform the synthesis application directed by the question. The response or responses use synthesis language appropriately to reflect an in-depth understanding of the skills of integrating for synthesis. The example or examples cited are well chosen and have a strong parallel development if the question demands it. The response or responses build beyond the question, integrating several layers and types of knowledge into one harmonious whole.

3 The developing response integrates textual material with aspects of other types of knowledge to create a surface level synthesis that has potential for development.

The response or responses generally perform the synthesis application directed by the question. The response or responses use synthesis language with some accuracy to reflect a basic understanding of the skills of integrating for synthesis. The example or examples cited are usually general and "safe" examples. Parallel development, if demanded, is not always visible. The response can be somewhat disjointed with the layers and types of knowledge not always well integrated.

1 The emerging response employs some skills of synthesizing literary texts, but a fully developed integration is still emerging.

The response or responses do not usually perform the synthesis application directed by the question. The response or responses do not use synthesis language with much accuracy; in fact, use of terminology often does not reflect the skills of integrating for synthesis. General references to an example or examples are made, and there is no visible understanding of parallel development. The response or responses do not usually integrate sources, texts, and understandings to a measurable degree.

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Reading a Literary Text Scoring Guide
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Developed by Lesley D. Thompson, Ph.D.

Critiquing for Evaluation

- Experiment with ideas in literary texts
- Express opinions about literary texts
- Raise questions about literary texts
- Make good judgments about literary text by using a synthesis of material derived from interpretation and inferential information
- Challenge the ideas of the author by noting bias, distortion, and/or lack of coherence
- Contrast the accuracy of textual information with other sources and form solid, defensible critiques

5 The advanced response evaluates to assert a strong voice in the textual relationship.
The response or responses thoroughly and thoughtfully answer the evaluation question. Evaluation terminology is used effectively, precisely, and thoroughly to indicate the reader's critique of the literary text. The example or examples chosen are well-developed, placed in context, and connected well to other ideas. The response or responses move beyond the parameters of the question and critically engage the world of text and ideas in a solid, defensible judgement.

3 The developing response hesitates to evaluate thoroughly; it still plays it somewhat "safe."
The response or responses adequately answer the evaluation question. Evaluation terminology is sometimes used, but the terms chosen do not always match the critical thinking displayed in the response. The example or examples cited from the text are somewhat obvious and safe, and connected to other ideas in fairly limited ways. The response or responses generally stay within the question and do not venture into the larger world of critical discourse.

1 The emerging response is just beginning to explore a critical stance to a literary text.
The response or responses do not adequately answer the evaluation question. Evaluation terminology is used sporadically if at all, and rarely indicates the reader's critique of the literary text. The example or examples chosen are incomplete or sketchily described, and not connected to other ideas or issues. The response or responses are incomplete and at times, just restate the question words.

APPENDIX D

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

The Traits of an Effective Reader
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Developed by Lesley D. Thompson, Ph.D.

Decoding Conventions

- The writing *conventions* of grammar, punctuation, word recognition, sentence structure
- The organizational *conventions* of the author or originating source name, the title, the chapter, the unit, the subsections, the sidebars, the glossary, the index, the table of contents, tables, graphs, or other text features
- The genre *conventions* (newspaper, magazine, text books, brochures, instructions, essays) and the types of modes appropriate to each informational genre (cause and effect, comparison contrast, proposition and support, goal, action, outcome, description, sequential spatial, etc.), the distinctions between each informational genre and the expectations readers have for informational genres

5 The advanced response demonstrates confidence in decoding conventions of informational texts and uses conventions information to form a thoughtful "thinking frame" of a text.
The response or responses directly answer the question(s) and use appropriate text structure language in specific and precise ways. The response or responses select an excellent example or several excellent examples to illustrate the reader's understanding of conventions. The examples are well-supported and the connections are clear. The response or responses also demonstrate a willingness and a desire to respond "beyond" the question(s) by building onto the initial question(s) and enlarging the thinking frame.

3 The developing response is growing in confidence in decoding conventions of the informational text and uses conventions information to form an initial "thinking frame" of the text.
The response or responses answer the question(s) generally and use some basic text structure language appropriately. The response or responses can allude to a general example or examples from the text to illustrate the reader's understanding of the conventions. The response or responses are fairly safe and stay definitely within the confines of the question(s).

1 The emerging response is just beginning to decode conventions and often times the challenge of decoding gets in the way of forming a "thinking frame" for the literary text.
The response or responses do not adequately answer the question (s) but may use text structure language to demonstrate some knowledge and application of decoding conventions. The response or responses do not usually provide an example or examples from the text but instead focus on more general information. The response or responses can usually be characterized as sketchy and incomplete.

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Establishing Comprehension

- Use pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading strategies to “squeeze” meaning out of the informational text
- Identify and explain vocabulary key to the main thesis of the informational text
- Identifying the main idea, major and minor examples, facts, statistics, expert
- Authority, and the turning moments of the informational text
- Distinguish between significant and supporting details that support the main idea
- Summarize and paraphrase with purpose to move towards making inferences and interpretations

5 The advanced response demonstrates a purposeful, expansive and knowledgeable comprehension of an informational text.
The response or responses confidently and directly answer the specific question(s) using comprehension terms to indicate precise understandings. The response or responses select an excellent example or examples to illustrate the reader's in-depth comprehension. Examples chosen are well-developed using clear and specific language and terms. The response or responses also demonstrate a willingness and a desire to respond “beyond” the question(s) by building onto the initial question(s) and increasing comprehension of an informational text into inferential and interpretative levels.

3 The developing response demonstrates an adequate comprehension of an informational text. Purposeful comprehension is still evolving.
The response or responses answer the question(s) in general ways using some comprehension terms to indicate general understandings. The response or responses may select an example or examples to illustrate the reader's literal comprehension. Examples chosen are somewhat “safe” and obvious choices. The response or responses do not venture beyond the initial question(s).

1 The emerging response is searching to establish a basic comprehension of an informational text.
The response or responses do not adequately answer the question(s). The response or responses do not provide examples for evidence but sometimes restate the question using the same words. It is not evident if a basic comprehension of an informational text has been achieved. The response or responses can be characterized as sketchy and incomplete.

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Realizing Context

- The vocabulary reflective of the context of the informational text
- The writing mode, tone, and voice the author or source selected with respect to the context
- The time period and its accompanying social realities in the informational text
- The perspective—point of view—of the informational text and its relationship to social factors
- The subject matter's context and its application to many aspects of informational texts

5 The advanced response realizes context and sees inferential meanings and intended purposes, both implicit and explicit.

The response or responses directly and specifically answer the question(s) using appropriate context terms to demonstrate understanding of inferential meaning. The response or responses use a clear and well-chosen example or examples to illustrate understandings of contextual issues. The response or response go beyond the question's limits and extend into an in-depth understandings of contextual relationships in informational texts.

3 The developing response realizes the context of the informational text to some degree and recognizes obvious types of inference.

The response or responses generally answer the question(s) and use some context terminology to show a basic level of understanding. The response or responses may use an example or examples to illustrate understanding but the examples chosen are somewhat obvious and "close to the surface." The response or responses usually stay within the safe confines of the question. The whole idea of contextual relationships between many factors and issues is still in development.

1 The emerging response guesses at context, but has difficulty accessing inferential types of knowledge.

The response or responses do not adequately address the question(s). The response or responses do not use examples from the text to illustrate inferential understandings. Sometimes the question is just restated using the same words. There is not enough evidence to decide if the reader understood the contextual layers of the informational text. The response demonstrates little effectiveness at "reading between the lines."

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The Traits of an Effective Reader

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Grades 3-12

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Developing Interpretations

- Identify problems, gaps, ambiguities, conflicts, and/or disparate points of view in informational texts
- Distinguish the contextual source behind the textual material that opens the text up to scrutiny
- Pose analytical explanations that bridge the gap, clarify the ambiguity, and resolve textual problems
- Connect analytical explanations to a "bigger picture."

5 The advanced response interprets to analyze and think critically about informational texts.

The response or responses directly answers the question(s) using specific evidence, clues, and "on target" information. The response or responses use appropriate language that reflects an in-depth understanding of the skills of interpretation. Examples, quotes, and events are cited from the text and connected strongly to the analysis. The response or responses move beyond the question(s), engage the bigger picture—a subject matter framework of historical significance, cultural importance or universal theme.

3 The developing response interprets to expand the text, but is still developing the connections to a larger world view.

The response or responses generally answer the question using some language that indicates an initial layer of interpretation understanding. The response or responses are generally safe, and cite very obvious examples from the text. Connections between the examples and the analysis are not always evident. The response or responses do not yet move beyond the question. Engaging the "bigger picture" is still a developing skill.

1 The emerging response sees interpretation as "talking about a book." Reading and interpreting are still separate processes.

The response or responses do not adequately address the question(s). The response does not cite examples, quotes, or evidence from the informational text to use as a basis for interpretation. Sometimes the question is just restated using the same words. There is not enough evidence of interpretation skill to accurately judge whether the student understands the concept of interpretation.

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Integrating for Synthesis

- Put information in order to explain an informational text's process and/or chronology
- Compare and contrast examples, facts, events and primary and secondary sources in order to make defensible judgments, interpretations, and decisions
- Recognize and describe the relationship between cause and effect in informational texts
- Integrate personal experience, background knowledge, and/or content knowledge with the informational text to create a "synthesis" of text plus knowledge

5 The advanced response integrates textual material and other types of knowledge, and uses decision-making skills to create a synthesis of ideas from an informational text.

The response or responses directly, specifically, and concretely perform the synthesis application directed by the question. The response or responses use synthesis language appropriately to reflect an in-depth understanding of the skills of integrating for synthesis. The example or examples cited are well chosen and have a strong parallel development if the question demands it. The response or responses build beyond the question, integrating several layers and types of knowledge into one harmonious whole.

3 The developing response integrates textual material with aspects of other types of knowledge to create a surface level synthesis that has potential for development.

The response or responses generally perform the synthesis application directed by the question. The response or responses use synthesis language with some accuracy to reflect a basic understanding of the skills of integrating for synthesis. The example or examples cited are usually general and "safe" examples. Parallel development, if demanded, is not always visible. The response can be somewhat disjointed with the layers and types of knowledge not always well integrated.

1 The emerging response employs some skills of synthesizing informational texts, but a fully developed integration is still emerging.

The response or responses do not usually perform the synthesis application directed by the question. The response or responses do not use synthesis language with much accuracy; in fact, use of terminology often does not reflect the skills of integrating for synthesis. General references to an example or examples are made, and there is no visible understanding of parallel development. The response or responses do not usually integrate sources, texts, and understandings to a measurable degree.

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Critiquing for Evaluation

- Experiment with ideas in informational texts
- Express opinions about informational texts
- Raise questions about informational texts
- Make good judgments about informational text by using a synthesis of material derived from interpretation and inferential information
- Challenge the ideas of the author or originating source by noting bias, distortion, and/or lack of coherence
- Contrast the accuracy of textual information with other sources and form solid, defensible critiques

5 The advanced response evaluates to assert a strong voice in the textual relationship.

The response or responses thoroughly and thoughtfully answer the evaluation question. Evaluation terminology is used effectively, precisely, and thoroughly to indicate the reader's critique of the informational text. The example or examples chosen are well-developed, placed in context, and connected well to other ideas. The response or responses move beyond the parameters of the question and critically engage the world of text and ideas in a solid, defensible judgement.

3 The developing response hesitates to evaluate thoroughly; it still plays it somewhat "safe."

The response or responses adequately answer the evaluation question. Evaluation terminology is sometimes used, but the terms chosen do not always match the critical thinking displayed in the response. The example or examples cited from the text are somewhat obvious and safe, and connected to other ideas in fairly limited ways. The response or responses generally stay within the question and do not venture into the larger world of critical discourse.

1 The emerging response is just beginning to explore a critical stance to an informational text.

The response or responses do not adequately answer the evaluation question. Evaluation terminology is used sporadically if at all, and rarely indicates the reader's critique of the informational text. The example or examples chosen are incomplete or sketchily described, and not connected to other ideas or issues. The response or responses are incomplete and at times, just restate the question words.

APPENDIX E

A Whale of a Tale

A gray whale raised at Sea World must learn to live in the sea.

As a scientist studying gray whales, Jim Sumich needs a lot of patience. He has spent years out at sea quietly waiting for baby gray whales to come to the surface. Sometimes he uses small balloons to trap the air from their blowholes, the openings on the tops of their heads. By studying their breathing, Sumich hopes to learn more about how a gray whale's body works.

One day in January 1997, Sumich got a big break. A 1,660-pound newborn gray whale washed up on a California shore. Animal rescue workers brought the tired, hungry orphan, a female, to Sea World in San Diego and named her J.J. "Suddenly we had this week-old gray whale drop in our laps." Sumich says J.J.'s arrival gave scientists the rare chance to study one of the sea's great giants up close. They learned new information about how gray whales breathe, hear and feed. But the scientists had an even bigger plan for J.J. They decided that someday they would try to release her back into the ocean.

Before she could return to her natural home, she had to grow strong. She needed to gain a lot of weight, so workers cooked up a high-fat formula that was like whale's milk. The recipe? Heavy cream, clams and powdered milk. It may sound fishy to you, but J.J. gulped it down and started growing and growing and growing. Since arriving at Sea World, J.J. has been gaining about two pounds every hour! She now weighs more than 17,000 pounds and is 29 feet long. And she's not nearly full grown.

J.J. is so healthy that scientists think she is almost ready to return to the ocean. They hope to release her in the next few weeks, when gray whales are migrating from southern Pacific waters near Mexico to colder waters near Alaska. "She'll have other gray whales to follow and to teach her where to feed," says Kevin Robinson, J.J.'s chief caretaker at Sea World.

But J. J.'s release won't be easy. For one thing, she's huge! A 32 foot-long sling has been designed to load her onto the back of a truck and then onto a boat. "Anything could happen," says Keith Yip, Sea World's supervisor of animal care. "Nothing like this has ever been done before."

Scientists are also concerned that J.J. may have problems eating on her own. J.J. is a baleen (Buh-len) whale, which means she has stiff bristles instead of teeth. The bristles trap tiny shrimplike creatures called krill, as well as small fish and worms. It takes a lot of krill to fill a gray whale's giant belly—2,400 pounds a day! It's too hard for scientists to collect that much krill, so they've fed her squid and fish instead. Now they are hoping that J.J. will learn to eat krill once she's back in the ocean.

Even if J.J. does develop a taste for krill, scientists are worried she may not realize that killer whales have a taste for her! Killer whales are a natural enemy of gray whales. But J.J.'s tank at Sea World is near the killer whale tank, and she may not fear them the way she should.

Still, J.J.'s sheltered life at Sea World may give her some advantages. "She is probably the healthiest, best-rested, 14-month-old gray whale on this planet," says Sumich.

Scientists have come up with an unusual way to film some of J.J.'s journey. They have trained two sea lions fitted with special video cameras to follow her. And scientists are planning to attach electronic markers to her back that will also help keep track of her.

If J.J.'s release goes well, it may lead to the freeing of other captive whales, including Keiko, the killer whale from the "Free Willy" movies. Keiko now lives at the Oregon Coast Aquarium. His caretakers are hoping to release him as early as this fall.

Even if J.J.'s return is a success, visitors to Sea World will be a little unhappy. "I think she'll be happier in the ocean, but I feel sad that people won't get to see her anymore," says Karen Henriquez, 10. Karen's fifth-grade class in Los Angeles folded 1,000 origami cranes as a good-luck present to J.J. "She's a very special whale."

DID YOU KNOW?

- The blue whale is the world's largest animal. An elephant can fit on a blue whale's tongue.
- Gray whales were hunted almost to extinction during the 19th and early 20th centuries. But their population has bounced back since they gained legal protection in 1946. Today there are more than 20,000 of them.
- A whale's skin is coated with oil to help it slide through the water. The skin feels smooth and rubbery, like a hard-boiled egg.
- A whale's tooth forms a new ring every year, just like a tree. Scientists can tell a whale's age by cutting a tooth in half and counting the rings.
- A blue whale's heart weights as much as a Volkswagen Beetle car!

  Whales are able to grow to such a huge size because their weight is held up by the water in the ocean. Their bones are lightweight and full of holes, like sponges.
- Killer whales are the fastest whales—they can swim as fast as 34 miles an hour! They got their name because they rule as the ocean's top hunters. They eat fish, seals, dolphins and other whales. But they do not eat humans.
- Whales cannot see well underwater, but they have very good hearing. Whales and bats are the only animals to use a system called echolocation. They find their way by following sounds and echoes. They also use sounds to find food.
- Male humpback whales sing to attract females. Each whale has his own song. A recording of humpback songs flew aboard the Voyager spacecraft as a greeting from Planet Earth!

  The humpback has the longest flippers of any whale, up to 17 feet.
- Whales, like humans, are mammals. Baby whales are called calves, and they drink milk from their mothers.

APPENDIX F

Rediscovering Jamestown

New finds show what life was like for America's first English settlers

BRENT SMITH, 8, of HOUSTON, TEXAS, CANNOT TAKE his eyes off the skeleton. Lying in a glass case at the National Geographic Society in Washington, D.C., the skeleton—with a bullet in its right leg—is a mystery. "I just *need* to know what happened to this guy," says Brent. "What was his name? How did he die?"

That's what historians are wondering too. The skeleton is nearly 400 years old. It was found in Jamestown, Virginia, site of the first permanent English settlement in America. For years, folks thought that the old fort there had been washed away by the James River. But new discoveries, including this skeleton, prove that the fort and its clues to colonial life are buried in the soil.

Many of these finds went on display at Geographic this month. Visitors can examine coins, candlesticks, armor, and arrowheads to learn what life was like for the settlers.

A CITY THAT WASN'T BUILT TO LAST

On May 13, 1607, a ship carrying 104 men and boys from England arrived at a pear-shaped peninsula in Virginia. It was named Jamestown, after Britain's King James. The soil and climate seemed just right for a new home. Using old-fashioned spelling, Captain John Smith described the spot as "a verie fit place for the erecting of a great cittie."

The colonists built a triangle-shaped fort along the river to protect themselves from the Spanish and Native Americans. Over the next few years, disease, starvation and attacks by the Powhatan Tribe killed many settlers. In 1608, a fire ravaged the fort.

Eventually, Jamestown, Virginia's capital, shifted east of the original site. In 1698 another fire destroyed important buildings there. The Governor of Virginia decided to move the capital to nearby Willamsburg. Old Jamestown began to disappear–at least above ground.

DUSTING OFF HISTORY

But what about underground? During the 1940s and 1950s, archaeologists began to explore and dig in parts of Jamestown. They found many artifacts but believed that the original fort must have washed away.

Archaeologist Bill Kelso didn't think so. In April 1994, he and others began digging at a tempting new spot. "There was a piece of ground, shaped like a triangle, that no one had ever put a shovel into."

His hunch paid off. Kelso and his team soon found bits of pottery that could only have been from the 1607 fort. "That first day, we knew we had found it!"

Since then, archaeologists have uncovered more than 180,000 artifacts from the early 1600s, including beads, keys and toys. And only a fraction of the fort's grounds have been explored! "We don't dig things up, we uncover them," says Kelso. The process requires great care: "You just can't hurry it up."

The team figured out the fort's exact location after finding marks in the ground where the original palisades (wooden spikes) had been. Using a tiny 1608 drawing and their math skills, the searchers sketched an outline of the fort. One corner is in the river, but most of it is on dry land, where its contents can be uncovered.

CLUES TO COLONIAL LIFE

The recent discoveries are giving scientists and historians the best picture ever of how early colonists lived and died. "Archaeology is like a time machine," says Kelso.

Pistols, knives and heavy armor tell the story of a violent time. But, says Kelso, "we started finding copper, copper, copper, just piles of it!" Colonists may have used copper, a precious metal, to buy peace with the Powhatan.

Some of the most intriguing finds are a few skeletons of the first settlers. Anthropologist Doug Owsley of the Smithsonian Institute is thrilled to study these remains. Bones tell you stories of what life was like for those people, what killed them, even what they ate."

So what about the skeleton now on display in Washington? Nicknamed J.R., for Jamestown Rediscovery, he was probably a teenager who bled to death after being hit by a musket ball. But who shot J.R.? And why? It is a colonial murder mystery.

The exhibit is open until May 17. But archaeologists will continue searching for the remains of 1607 Jamestown for at least 10 years. By then they hope to have more answers for kids like Brent Smith, who looks one last time at the skeleton and says, "Wow! I really like knowing what happened 400 years ago."

The True Story of Pocahontas and Captain John Smith?
Everyone knows the Jamestown tale of how Pocahontas rescued Captain John Smith from her father, Chief Powhatan. But is it true? No one can say. Smith, enjoyed telling stories about being saved by women! What's certain is that Pocahontas came to like the English settlers after they kidnapped her to use as a bargaining chip with the chief. She learned English, was renamed Rebecca, and wed her true love, farmer John Rolfe, in 1614.

In 1616, Pocahontas and Rolfe toured England with their infant son Thomas. Pocahontas delighted King James and was treated like a princess. But just before the family was to return to Virginia, she fell ill and died. She is buried in England.

APPENDIX G

BEAUTY: WHEN THE OTHER DANCER IS THE SELF (from *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* by Alice Walker)

It is a bright summer day in 1947. My father, a fat, funny man with beautiful eyes and a subversive wit is trying to decide which of his eight children he will take with him to the county fair. My mother, of course, will not go. She is knocked out from getting most of us ready: I hold my neck stiff against the pressure of her knuckles as she hastily completes the braiding and then beribboning of my hair.

My father is the driver for the rich old white lady up the road. Her name is Miss Mey. She owns all the land for miles around, as well as the house in which we live. All I remember about her is that she once offered to pay my mother thirty-five cents for cleaning her house, raking up piles of her magnolia leaves, and washing her family's clothes, and that my mother—she of no money, eight children, and a chronic earache—refused it. But I do not think of this in 1947. I am two and half years old. I want to go everywhere my daddy goes. I am excited at the prospect of riding in a car. Someone has told me fairs are fun. That there is room in the car for only three of us doesn't faze me at all. Whirling happily in my starchy frock, showing off my biscuit-polished patent-leather shoes and lavender socks, tossing my head in a way that makes my ribbons bounce, I stand, hands on hips, before my father. "Take me, Daddy," I say with assurance: "I'm the prettiest!"

Later, it does not surprise me to find myself in Miss Mey's shiny black car, sharing the back seat with the other lucky ones. Does not surprise me that I thoroughly enjoy the fair. At home that night I tell the unlucky ones all I can remember about the merry-go-round, the man who eats live chickens, and the teddy bears, until they say: that's enough, baby Alice. Shut up now, and go to sleep.

It is Easter Sunday, 1950. I am dressed in a green, flocked, scalloped-hem dress (handmade by my adoring sister, Ruth) that has its own smooth satin petticoat and tiny hot-pink roses tucked into each scallop. My shoes, new T-strap patent leather, again highly biscuit-polished. I am six years old and have learned one of the longest Easter speeches to be heard that day, totally unlike the speech I said when I was two: "Easter lilies / pure and white / blossom in / the morning light." When I rise to give my speech I do so on a great wave of love and pride and expectation. People in the church stop rustling their new crinolines. They seem to hold their breath. I can tell they admire my dress, but it is my spirit, bordering on sassiness (womanishness), they secretly applaud.

"That girl's a little *mess*," they whisper to each other, pleased.

Naturally I say my speech without stammer or pause, unlike those who stutter, stammer, or, worst of all, forget. This is before the word "beautiful" exists in people's vocabulary, but "Oh isn't she the *cutest* thing!" frequently floats my way. "And got so much sense!" they gratefully add ... for which thoughtful addition I thank them to this day.

It was great fun being cute. But then, one day, it ended.

I am eight years old and a tomboy. I have a cowboy hat, cowboy boots, checkered shirt and pants, all red. My playmates are my brothers, two and four years older than I. Their colors are black and green, the only difference in the way we are dressed. On Saturday nights we all go to the picture show, even my mother; Westerns are her favorite kind of movie. Back home, "on the ranch," we pretend we are Tom Mix, Hopalong Cassidy, Lash LaRue (we've even named one of our dogs Lash LaRue); we chase each other for hours rustling cattle, being outlaws, delivering damsels from distress. Then my parents decide to buy my brothers guns. These are not "real" guns. They shoot "BBs," copper pellets my brothers say will kill birds. Because I am a girl, I do not get a gun. Instantly I am relegated to the position of Indian. Now there appears a great distance between us. They shoot and shoot at everything with their new guns. I try to keep up with my bow and arrows.

One day while I am standing on top of our makeshift "garage"—pieces of tin nailed across some poles—holding my bow and arrow and looking out toward the fields, I feel an incredible blow in my right eye. I look down just in time to see my brother lower his gun.

Both brothers rush to my side. My eye stings, and I cover it with my hand. "If you tell," they say, "we will get a whipping. You don't want that to happen, do you?" I do not. "Here is a piece of wire." Says the older brother, picking it up from the roof; "say you stepped on one end of it and the other flew up and hit you." The pain is beginning to start. "Yes," I say. "Yes, I will say that is what happened." If I do not say this is what happened, I know my brothers will find ways to make me wish I had. But now I will say anything that gets me to my mother.

Confronted by our parents we stick to the lie agreed upon. They place me on a bench on the porch and I close my left eye while they examine the right. There is a tree growing from underneath the porch that climbs past the railing to the roof. It is the last thing my right eye sees. I watch as its trunk, its branches, and then its leaves are blotted out by the rising blood.

I am in shock. First there is intense fever, which my father tries to break using lily leaves bound around my head. Then there are chills: my mother tries to get me to eat soup. Eventually, I do not know how, my parents learn what has happened. A week after the "accident" they take me to see a doctor. "Why did you wait so long to come?" he asks, looking into my eye and shaking his head. "Eyes are sympathetic," he says. "If one is blind, the other will likely become blind too."

This comment of the doctor's terrifies me. But it is really how I look that bothers me most. Where the BB pellet struck there is a glob of whitish scar tissue, a hideous cataract, on my eye. Now when I stare at people—a favorite pastime, up to now—they will stare back. Not at the "cute" little girl, but at her scar. For six years I do not stare at anyone, because I do not raise my head.

Years later, in the throes of a mid-life crisis, I ask my mother and sister whether I changed after the "accident." "No," they say, puzzled. "What do you mean?"

What do I mean?

I am eight, and, for the first time, doing poorly in school, where I have been something of a whiz since I was four. We have just moved to the place where the "accident" occurred. We do not know any of the people around us because this is a different county. The only time I see the friends I knew is when we go back to our old church. The new school is the former state penitentiary. It is a large stone building, cold and drafty, crammed to overflowing with boisterous, ill-disciplined children. On the third floor there is a huge circular imprint of some partition that has been torn out.

"What used to be here?" I ask a sullen girl next to me on our way past it to lunch.

"The electric chair," says she.

At night I have nightmares about the electric chair, and about all the people reputedly "fried" in it. I am afraid of the school, where all the students seem to be budding criminals.

"What's the matter with your eye?" they ask, critically.

When I don't answer (I cannot decide whether it was an "accident" or not), they shove me, insist on a fight.

My brother, the one who created the story about the wire, comes to my rescue. But then brags so much about "protecting" me, I become sick.

After months of torture at the school, my parents decide to send me back to our old community, to my old school. I live with my grandparents and the teacher they board. But there is no room for Phoebe, my cat. By the time my grandparents decide there *is* room, and I ask for my cat, she cannot be found. Miss Yarborough, the boarding teacher, takes me under her wing, and begins to teach me to play the piano. But soon she marries an African—a "prince," she says—and is whisked away to his continent.

At my old school there is at least one teacher who loves me. She is the teacher who "knew me before I was born" and bought my first baby clothes. It is she who makes life bearable. It is her presence that finally helps me turn on the one child at the school who continually calls me "one-eyed bitch." One day I simply grab him by his coat and beat him until I am satisfied. It is my teacher who tells me my mother is ill.

My mother is lying in bed in the middle of the day, something I have never seen. She is in too much pain to speak. She has an abscess in her ear. I stand looking down on her, knowing that if she dies, I cannot live. She is being treated with warm oils and hot bricks held against her cheek. Finally a doctor comes. But I must go back to my grandparents' house. The weeks pass but I am hardly aware of it. All I know is that my mother might die, my father is not so jolly, my brothers still have their guns, and I am the one sent away from home.

"You did not change," they say.

Did I imagine the anguish of never looking up?

I am twelve. When relatives come to visit I hide in my room. My cousin Brenda, just my age, whose father works in the post office and whose mother is a nurse, comes to find me. "Hello," she says. And then she asks, looking at my recent school picture, which I did not want taken; and on which the "glob," as I think of it, is clearly visible, "You still can't see out of the that eye?"

"No," I say, and flop back on the bed over my book.

That night, as I do almost every night I abuse my eye. I rant and rave at it, in front of the mirror. I plead with it to clear up before morning. I tell it I hate and despise it. I do not pray for sight. I pray for beauty.

"You did not change," they say.

I am fourteen and baby-sitting for my brother Bill, who lives in Boston. He is my favorite brother and there is a strong bond between us. Understanding my feelings of shame and ugliness he and his wife take me to a local hospital, where the "glob" is removed by a doctor named O. Henry. There is still a small bluish crater where the scar tissue was, but the ugly white stuff is gone. Almost immediately I become a different person from the girl who does not raise her head. Or so I think. Now that I've raised my head I win the boyfriend of my dreams. Now that I've raised my head I have plenty of friends. Now that I've raised my head classwork comes from my lips as faultlessly as Easter speeches did, and I leave high school as valedictorian, most popular student, and *queen*, hardly believing my luck. Ironically, the girl who was voted most beautiful in our class (and was) later shot twice through the chest by a male companion, using a "real" gun, while she was pregnant. But that's another story in itself. Or is it?

"You did not change," they say.

It is now thirty years since the "accident." A beautiful journalist comes to visit and to interview me. She is going to write a cover story for her magazine that focuses on my latest book. "Decide how you want to look on the cover," she says. "Glamorous, or whatever."

Never mind "glamorous," it is the "whatever" that I hear. Suddenly all I can think of is whether I will get enough sleep the night before the photography session: if I don't, my eye will be tired and wander, as blind eyes will.

At night in bed with my lover I think up reasons why I should not appear on the cover of a magazine. "My meanest critics will say I've sold out," I say. "My family will now realize I write scandalous books."

"But what's the real reason you don't want to do this?" he asks.

"Because in all probability," I say in a rush, "my eye won't be straight."

"It will be straight enough," he says. Then, "Besides, I thought you'd made your peace with that."

And I suddenly remember that I have.

I remember:

I am talking to my brother Jimmy, asking if he remembers anything unusual about the day I was shot. He does not know I consider that day the last time my father, with his sweet home remedy of cool lily leaves, chose me, and that I suffered and raged inside because of this. "Well," he says, "all I remember is standing by the side of the highway with Daddy, trying to flag down a car. A white man stopped, but when Daddy said he needed somebody to take his little girl to the doctor, he drove off.

I remember:

I am in the desert for the first time. I fall totally in love with it. I am so overwhelmed by its beauty, I confront for the first time, consciously, the meaning of the doctor's words years ago: "Eyes are sympathetic. If one is blind, the other will likely become blind too." I realize I have dashed about the world madly, looking at this, looking at that, storing up images against the fading of the light. *But I might have missed seeing the desert!* The shock of that possibility—and gratitude for over twenty-five years of sight—sends me literally to my knees. Poem after poem comes—which is perhaps how poets pray.

ON SIGHT

I am so thankful I have seen
The Desert
And the creatures in the desert
And the desert Itself.

The desert has its own moon
Which I have seen
With my own eye.
There is no flag on it.

Trees of the desert have arms
All of which are always up
That is because the moon is up
The sun is up
Also the sky
The stars
Clouds
None with flags.

If there *were* flags, I doubt
the trees would point.
Would you?

But mostly, I remember this:

I am twenty-seven, and my baby daughter is almost three. Since her birth I have worried about her discovery that her mother's eyes are different from other people's. Will she be embarrassed? I think. What will she say? Every day she watches a television program called "Big Blue Marble." It begins with a picture of the earth as it appears from the moon. It is bluish, a little battered-looking, but full of light, with whitish clouds swirling around it. Every time I see it I weep with love, as if it is a picture of Grandma's house. One day when I am putting Rebecca down for her nap, she suddenly focuses on my eye. Something inside me cringes, gets ready to try to protect myself. All children are cruel about physical differences, I know from experience, and that they don't always mean to be is another matter. I assume Rebecca will be the same.

But no-o-o-o. She studies my face intently as we stand, her inside and me outside her crib. She even holds my face maternally between her dimpled little hands. Then, looking every bit as serious and lawyerlike as her father, she says, as if it may just possibly have slipped my attention: "Mommy, there's a world in your eye." (As in, "Don't be alarmed, or do anything crazy.") And then, gently, but with great interest: "Mommy, where did you *get* that world in your eye?"

For the most part, the pain left then. (So what, if my brothers grew up to buy even more powerful pellet guns for their sons and to carry real guns themselves. So what, if a young "Morehouse man" once nearly fell off the steps of Trevor Arnett Library because he thought my eyes were blue.) Crying and laughing I ran to the bathroom, while Rebecca mumbled and sang herself off to sleep. Yes indeed, I realized, looking into the mirror. There *was* a world in my eye. And I saw that it was possible to love it: that in fact, for all it had taught me of shame and anger and inner vision, I *did* love it. Even to see it drifting out of orbit in boredom, or rolling up out of fatigue, not to mention floating back at attention in excitement (bearing witness, a friend has called it), deeply suitable to my personality, and even characteristic of me.

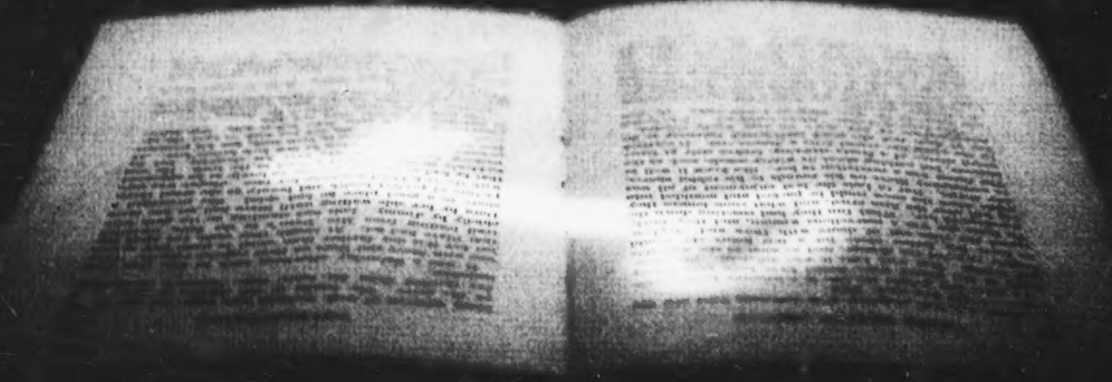
That night I dream I am dancing to Stevie Wonder's song "Always" (the name of the song is really "As," but I hear it as "Always"). As I dance, whirling and joyous, happier than I've ever been in my life, another bright-faced dancer joins me. We dance and kiss each other and hold each other through the night. The other dancer has obviously come through all right, as I have done. She is beautiful, whole and free. And she is also me.

1983

THE JOURNEY OF A READER

Reading is about more than just reading the symbols and letters on a page. When good readers read, they read critically, they read deeply, they apply information and pull on their experience to access and understand the world of ideas and subjects. As educators, we want all readers to know and be able to develop the skills of critical reading.

In *The Journey of a Reader* we present an assessment model that breaks reading down into a manageable group of six teachable—and assessable—skills, or "traits." These traits allow us to identify what good readers do, and to describe "good reading" to readers who read on a variety of ability levels.



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